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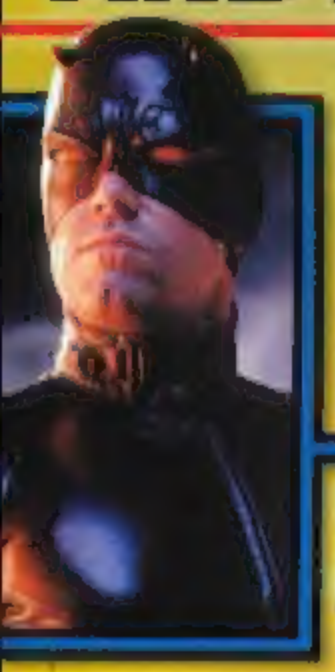

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ON THE COVERS

The **Ultimate Wolverine and Ultimate Captain America** cover (left) was drawn by Andy Kubert and colored by Richard Isanove. Get on over to **page 86** to see where they place in our Best of 2002 feature. The **movie Daredevil** cover, courtesy of 20th Century Fox, points to the Q&A with director Mark Steven Johnson on **page 46**. The **'80s collage** cover is a collection drawn by today's hottest retro artists. Test your '80s knowledge with our quiz on **page 54**.

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See that kickin' piece of Alex Ross art? Wanna win it? Here's your chance! Dynamic Forces is celebrating its 10th anniversary and is giving away this and lots of other cool stuff, including original pieces of art by *Transformers* artist Pat Lee and *G.I. Joe: Frontline* artist Dan Jurgens! Send your entry in today!

'Teen Titans' animated series, p. 102

EXCLUSIVE OFFER

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Just in time for the "Daredevil" movie hitting theaters in February, pick up your copy of this fantastic reprint of *Daredevil* #1, the Man Without Fear's first appearance in comics! Exclusive to this ACE edition are an acetate cover by J. Scott Campbell, an introduction by current *Daredevil* scribe Brian Michael Bendis and another installment of the wacky "Twisted ToyFare Theatre"! Leap your way to page 32 to order yours today!

PUBLISHER'S LETTER

FROM THE TOP

ONE FOR THE AGES

Hey, everyone! Another year is coming to a close and another *Wizard* Year-Ender issue has been put to bed.

This undoubtedly has been one of the best years in the comics industry, as evidenced by a host of big events that fueled fan excitement, generated constant buzz and attracted more and more readers to the fold. Geez, where do I start? There was the *Batman 10-Cent Adventure*, the "Spider-Man" movie and Free Comic Book Day. There was also the retro revival, the Heritage auctions and "Birds of Prey." And how about HeroClix, Vertigo's resurgence and *30 Days of Night*'s million-dollar payday? All of these events and more helped make 2002 a year to remember.

With that in mind, we hashed out this special issue to wrap up the year that was. First up is a feature that determines which were the biggest breakout events of the year (**page 78**). Following that, we hammered out our selections for the best in comics—from best book, to best hero to best moment—and it all starts on **page 86**. We also called out the best of the best in certain columns and departments, so look for this icon throughout the issue.

But don't forget our other cool features! We've got something for everyone. For movie lovers, we've got some awesome new photos of the "X-Men 2" production to go along with our set report (**page 34**), and there's also an insightful interview with "Daredevil" director Mark Steven Johnson (**page 46**), a self-professed comic fan. If you like cool art, check out the feature on how we would "Ultimize" the DC Universe if given the chance (**page 64**). And for you retro fans, test your knowledge in our '80s quiz on **page 54**.

Enjoy the issue! Have a happy holiday season everyone. Be safe and meet you back here in a month!

Sincerely,

Gareb Shamus

BY THE NUMBERS

Statistics compiled when we put this bad boy together

Cumulative number of hours staffers spent in the Death Cage Match otherwise known as the "Best of 2002" meeting	17
Number of books in "Daredevil" director Mark Steven Johnson's office	1*
Number of times Staff Writer Mike Cotton asked, "Where's Kirsten Dunst?" during his "X-Men 2" set visit	2
Number of staffers who earned perfect scores on our super-'80s quiz, like Price Guide Editor Karl Cramer here	0
Spot in the Nielsen ratings where writer Jeph Loeb's first "Smallville" episode, "Red," wound up for its time slot	1
Number of Robin alter egos dropped during the "Birds of Prey" second episode, "Slick"	3
Minutes Staff Writer Casey Seijas interviewed Canadian actress Rachel Skarsten (Dinah on "Birds of Prey") for this month's "Hot Seat"	31
Number of times she laughed at his lame Canadian jokes	0
Number of finalists for the "Best Covers of 2002" price guide sidebars	83
Number of covers selected	22
Number of cases of Pabst Blue Ribbon consumed during the production cycle of this issue	1
Number of staffers who consumed said case (in a day-and-a-half, no less)	1
Number of photos Associate Editor Andy Serwin snapped of a polar bear airing out its private parts at the Bronx Zoo	3**

*It's a hardcover copy of *Daredevil: Yellow*. **Uh, we don't know why either.

MASTHEAD

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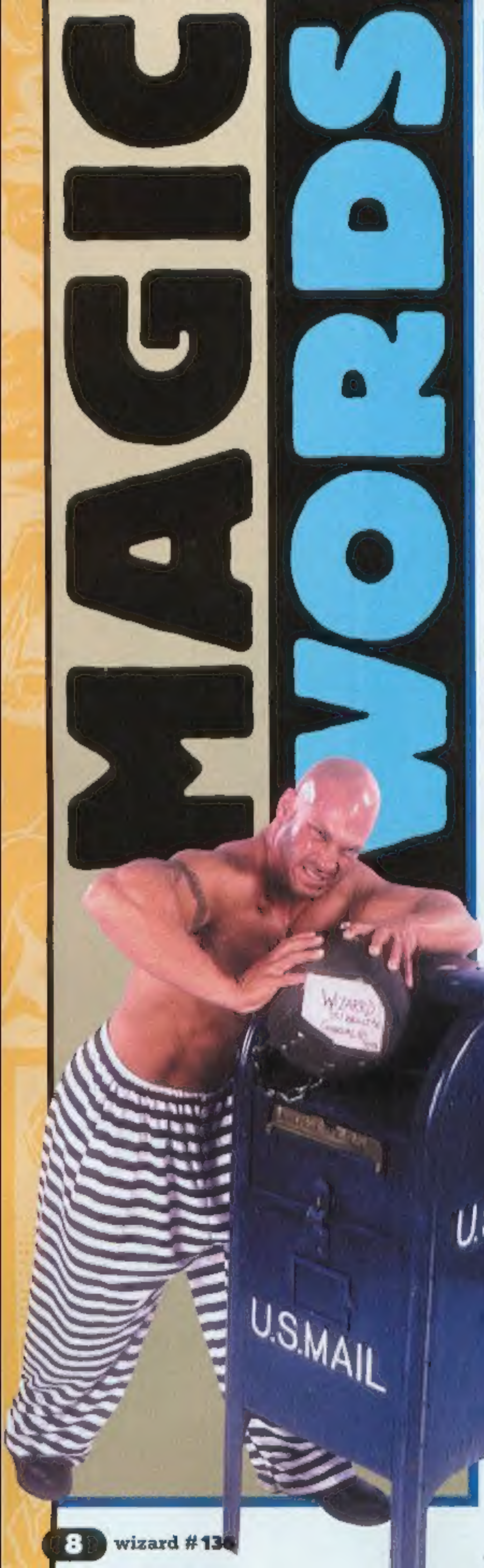
MAGIC WORDS



WIZARD CELEBRATES 100 ISSUES OF JIM McLAUCHLIN IN 'MAGIC WORDS'!

JIM GETS ROASTED BY PROS! . . .JIM VOMITS AT JIM LEE'S! . . .& JIM CRIES LIKE A GIRL!

And here you thought this was just another plain ol' issue of *Wizard*.

Okay, maybe it is just another plain ol' issue of *Wizard*. But to me, it's a teensy bit special, as well.

Y'see, this column marks my 100th "Magic Words." That's right—Young Jim McLauchlin started this beat waaaaay back in *Wizard* #32 (April, 1994, for those of you scoring at home), and after being introduced by our esteemed Editor-in-Chief Pat McCallum as being "not a jerk" (Gee, nice sentiment there, Pat), a pseudo-legend was born. Now, Old and Grizzled Jim McLauchlin wonders just how this all spiraled out of control.

It's right about now that those of you with fourth-grade educations are scratching your cerebral ridges and deducing that *Wizard* #136 minus *Wizard* #32 hardly equals an even 100. Go to the head of the class, Einstein. During the long, strange trip, there have been a few breaks—a Jack Kirby tribute in #33 and a few months taken off for...uh...let's just call them "mental health reasons." So this is it—number 100, in all its glory.

We've opened the lines of communication this month to a few savants and sages of the comic book business to "roast" me. I figure I musta got a pound of their flesh at some point. Now it's their turn.

So away we go, in true Dean Martin Celebrity Roast tradition. Phyllis Diller isn't here. But Mark Millar is. And isn't that close enough?

Dearest *Wizard* Readers,

A lot of people know Jim The Writer, but what a lot of you don't hear about is Jim the Pool-Shark. I remember a party at Jim Lee's place where McLauchlin told me what a great player he was and suggested we team up against Jim Lee and Lee Bermejo. That night, I watched in awe as Jim The Pool-Shark failed to pot balls I still maintain were scientifically IMPOSSIBLE to miss.

A lot of people only know Jim The Writer, but how many people know Jim The Drinker? At that very same party, I remember Jim knocking back as many free drinks as he could. It's just a shame those drinks *also* knocked back. Yes, Jim Lee, that IS the stain on your tennis court.

A lot of people only know Jim The Writer, but are you familiar with Jim The Ladies Man? By the end of that night at Jim Lee's place, not a single woman had even made eye contact with McLauchlin (despite several desperate attempts) and it occurred to me that only a man either so confident in his own sexuality or so used to rejection could possibly walk that tall as he headed back to his hotel with a copy of *Big 'Uns* under his arm.

Fortunately, Jim McLauchlin can earn a nice living as Jim The Writer.

Mark Millar
Writer of Ultimate X-Men, The Ultimates

BUNNY AWARD

LETTER OF THE MONTH

To Whom It May Concern:

Wow, I get to roast Jim McLauchlin? Honestly, there's not much I can say about Jim that hasn't already been grunted in rest stop men's rooms across the nation.

Jim, you and I go back a long way, and that's really a God-awful shame. It just shows you what a shambles my life has become, and even worse, that you believe every bit of triteness that dribbles out of my mouth. To say you've been lucky in this industry, Jim, is like saying that I like French fries. You're a hack, Jim, and when I die and surely get sent to the bowels of Hell, the first thing I'm going to do is go through Satan's filing cabinet and look for that contract you signed. I'm sure I'll find it filed right along side such dignitaries as the entire Van Patten Family, every Beach Boy but Brian Wilson, Tina, Nancy and Frank Sinatra Jr., Jim Belushi and the chick that married Springsteen for that year and got $75 mil.

By the way, Jim, congratulations on your recent nuptials as well, despite my surprise. I don't want to say you're ugly, but the fact that your new wife DOESN'T want her cataracts operated on says a lot.

But of course, I kid, Jim. Ummm...that's what one is *supposed* to say after one of these things, right?

Joe Quesada
Marvel Editor-In-Chief

I'm sure my folder in Satan's file cabinet is located right after a dossier labeled, "Quesada, Joe," that details all sorts of stuff about how one becomes editor-in-chief at a major publishing company through strategic goat sacrifice, shifting of blame and sleeping with key executives.

Cough!* Jemas! *Cough!

Hey! I was *on fire* that night shooting pool! I won nine in a row! None could say me nay on the chalky felt!

But that thing about the tennis court is all true.

And it was a copy of *Chunky Asses*, for the record.

Everyone,

Never, in my wildest dreams, would I have expected that pros of questionable character throughout the comic industry would line up to pay tribute to Jim McLauchlin—or at least pretend to—until Jim gets drunk enough to pay the tab.

The reason I'm surprised is that I've known Jim for a long, long time. I know it's impossible to believe, but he wasn't always the man of stature he currently claims to be. By the way he writes and carries himself with a feigned cosmopolitan attitude, most of you probably think he was raised in an environment of class and great riches.

But in truth, Jim's a Minnesotan. Think of the most barren scenes from the move "Fargo," of the snowy, windswept plains that seemed to stretch forever. That is Jim's homeland.

Think of the most stinted dialogue, of startling double negatives piled endlessly in sentences. That is Jim's way.

Think of those bawdy, slightly plump women with big, tossed hair and a profound hunger for chocolate. Those are Jim's people—at least in his fantasies.

Think of the famous wood chipper scene and you pretty much have Jim—a dogged, hard worker who never gives up, and always gets the job done, so long as you don't mind the bloody mess.

That is Jim McLauchlin.

Dan Jurgens
Artist, *G.I. Joe: Frontline*

Yeah, well, Dan Jurgens is from Minnesota, too, and from a place called "Ortonville," to boot. That's two steps down from Smallville on the cosmopolitan scale. Take his words for what they're worth.

Dearest Jim,

Congratulations on answering 100 consecutive issues worth of mail for that fine publication you toil for. Certainly answering the mail was the most difficult part of completing the first 100 issues of *Savage Dragon*. Never mind writing, pencilling or inking 100 consecutive issues—that was a walk in the park! It was answering the mail that was the *real* challenge! After all, any boob can write, pencil and ink 100 consecutive issues of their own comic book. But how many guys can answer that much mail, huh?

Yeah. A hundred issues of mail. You're a funny-book stud.

Erik Larsen
Now up to 102 consecutive issues written, penciled and inked of *Savage Dragon*

The doctors don't let me handle sharp objects such as pencils. Otherwise, I *would* draw something. I think.

HEY! IT'S PEN PALS...

Like a title? Hate a character? Just have something to say? Then write your favorite comic company and let 'em know what you're thinking. Send your thoughts to the following addresses, but be sure to send your letters in care of a particular book or editor. Power to the people!

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Dear *Wizard*,

I was shocked! Shocked, when I learned about a roast for Jim McLauchlin. I couldn't believe it. You only roast people you love—or hate. But neither applies to this man who is so lacking in luster that he inspires no emotions whatever on anyone's part.

You see, Jim is far too colorless to roast. Despite his exalted position and the seemingly limitless power he wields within our industry; despite his ability to elevate or destroy a hapless cartoonist with a single pithy phrase, he's completely unmemorable.

So, fie upon this impossible roast! Fie upon ye who would subject so inconsequential a man to such senseless savagery. Let us instead be grateful that he exists to make the rest of us look so much better by contrast.

But now that I've concluded that obligatory bit of nonsense, let me close with the unvarnished truth about Jim McLauchlin. Any right-thinking man will admit that he is the most amiable, admirable and adorable credit to comicbookdom that one can find. Any man would consider himself lucky to call Jim McLauchlin "friend!"

Unfortunately, I am not that man.

Excelsior!

Stan Lee
Writer of fine funnybooks

He builds you up, he breaks you down. He is Stan "The Man" Lee. Accept no substitutes.

Dear All,

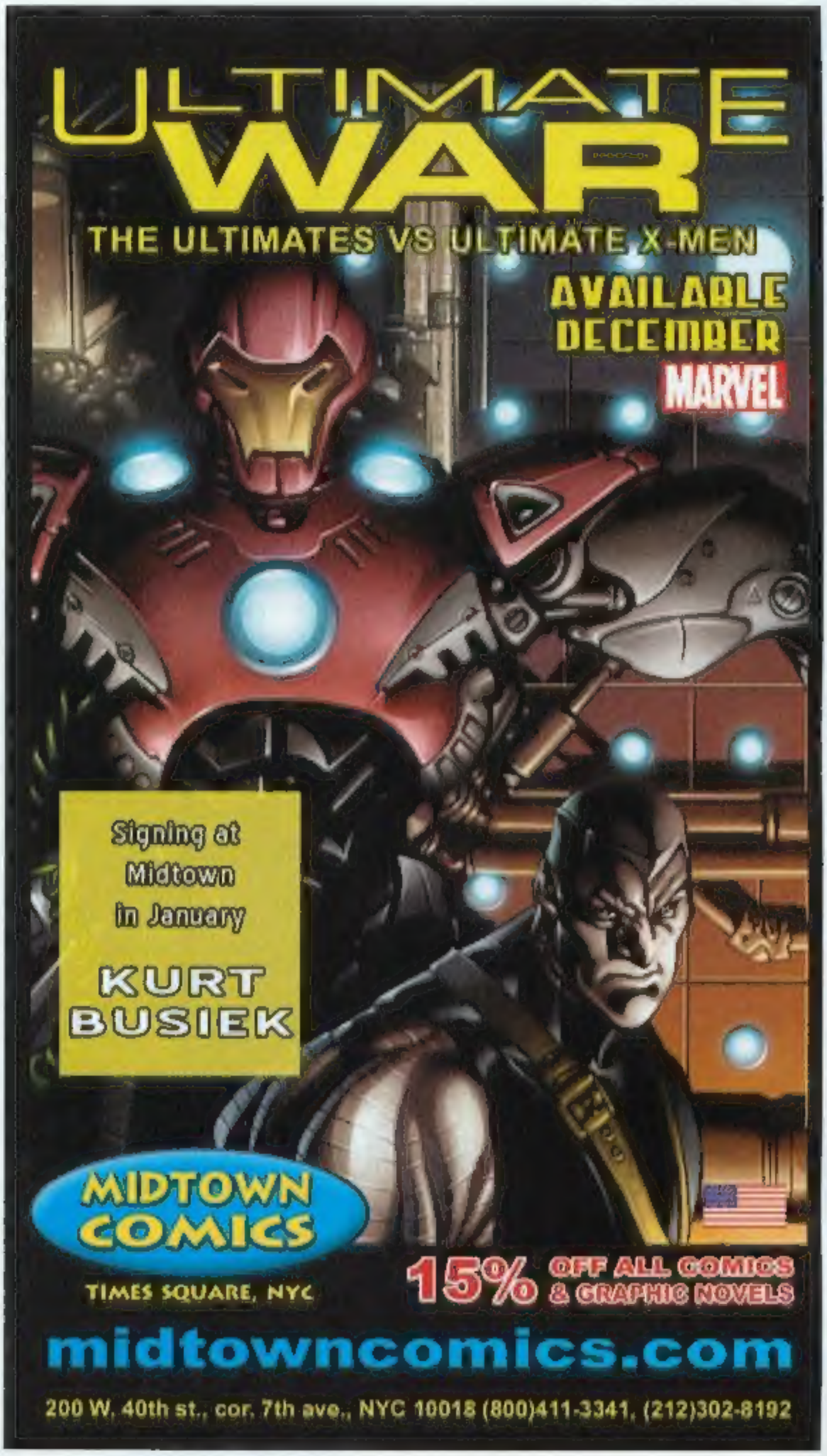
You meet a lot of phonies in L.A., but I can safely say Jim McLauchlin has been nothing but a friend to me.

I know I can count on hearing that chipper "How's it goin', man?" any hour of the day or night, almost always followed by a request for the contact number for this season's hot animation producer or a writer whose books sell better than mine. But that's the business, right? You help out a brother when you can, and Jim has always been there for me, too.

When I announced my new Oni Press series *Mutant, Texas*, Jim promised to do a cover story on it for *Wizard*. Unfortunately the article never saw print because after I answered "no" to Jim's first question, "Is Alex Ross involved?" his cell phone mysteriously quit. I guess the reception is bad in the Hollywood Hills around Kevin Smith's house.

Jim later told me he was on his way to a party there, and while everyone could invite as many friends as they liked, someone had to volunteer to come solo in order to balance things out and Jim, altruistic soul that he is, made the sacrifice by not inviting me. It's not often you see that sort of selflessness in this town. Jim's one of the good ones.

Paul Dini
Writer/Producer
"The Batman Adventures,"
"Duck Dodgers"



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QUICK HITS

THE READERS STRIKE BACK!

"Why must I live in a world obsessed with Dragon Ball Z? We all know Goku couldn't beat Superman [*Wizard* #133's 'East vs. West']."

—Anndrea Davis, Las Cruces, NM

"After reading *The Pro* from Garth Ennis and Image Comics, I have to say it was probably the funniest comic I've read... *ever!*"

—Joe Koelbl, Jacksonville, FL

"*Marville*, written by Marvel President Bill Jemas, begins with a page explaining the book's inside jokes? It says something about quality when you have to explain your jokes *before* you even make them.

—Jason Muhr, Carol Stream, IL

"One important name was not included in the list of black writers and artists in 'Magic Words,' #134–Alex Simmons. He's currently writing the novella *Night of Fear*, which I am illustrating, and is one of the best-kept secrets in comics!

—David Michael Beck, *G.I. Joe* cover artist

"Someone ought to tell those *G.I. Joe* guys they're doing a great job. Comics haven't been this fun since I read the old *Joes* back in the 1980s."

—Bob Pelligrini, Waltham, MA

"The only mainstream publisher of horror comics is no more? Chaos! Comics was my inspiration, and set the modern standard for horror comics."

—Rudy Best, leakinlena@prodigy.net

"Thank God for fans like Ben Roberts [*Wizard* #134's Halloween Costume Contest]. *I'll* never dress up as Spongebob Squarepants. Good thing someone else will."

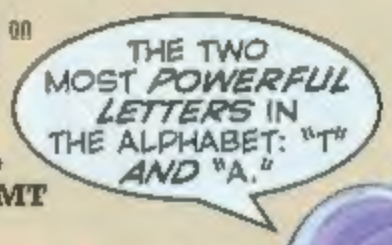
—Jim Hallock, Tyler, TX

"'Birds of Prey' on TV: Not much story, lots of cleavage. Two thumbs down."

—Becca Samuelson, Ocala, FL

"I've been loving the 'Justice League' cartoon on Cartoon Network. The news that they're also doing 'Teen Titans' is double-good."

—Erick Ethanson, Great Falls, MT



"I read *Freemind* #0 and I'm pulling for these Future Comics guys. About time someone tried something different in comics."

—Mike Purkey, Pittsburgh, PA

"Frank Cho? Drawing jungle babes on a *Shanna the She-Devil* comic? Count me in!"

—Thomas Anderson, Spokanne, WA

"Thanks for the *Darkness* #1 preview [*Wizard* #134]. Dale Keown is *still* the best comic artist around!"

—Robby Charleston, Kansas City, MO

"Forget Mary Jane! After reading *Spider-Man/Black Cat*, the Black Cat should just skip in and take Mary Jane's place as Spidey's love interest."

—Gary Brantner, Riverside, CA

No, honest. Cell phone reception *is* horrible in the Hills. Especially around Playboy Mansion. Speaking of which...

Dear Jim:

One hundred issues, huh? Dang. You remember when we ran naked through Hefner's mansion and got trapped by those Barbi twins? How 'bout that time we jumped out on the field and robbed Barry Bonds of his 73rd homer just for laughs? And I think my all-time favorite thing was when we were doing tequila and roach spray shooters and you blew chunks all over The Terrible Toddy. Man, we've have some wild times.

What's that? You don't remember doing this stuff? Huh. Must've been two OTHER guys.

Oh well, happy anniversary, whoever you are...

Jeph Loeb
From his Batcave in Los Angeles

Funny. I have equally vivid memories of a man I remember as "Jeph Loeb" involving a trip to Tijuana and a donkey show. But I digress...

Dear *Wizard* Readers,

I've been told that the entire purpose of this column is to elicit from industry professionals a piece designed to roast Jim McLauchlin. I'm sorry, but I don't think I'll be able to accommodate that request.

In many ways, Jim is all about what's right in this industry. He started ACTOR, A Commitment To Our Roots, to get funds for comic creators who found themselves in difficult straits. He manages to work across all political boundaries in this industry without sacrificing his integrity, respect for others or his job responsibilities. I'm honored by the fact that we have a great friendship. He amuses us all every month and is one of the most knowledgeable individuals in this profession.

Since I know this column is being read by the many thousands of fans that Jim has earned, it might be nice of all of you to take a moment to do something nice for Jim. I would guess that most, if not all of you, are unaware of Jim's passion for and love of snakes. If each and every one of you could drop in the mail to Jim's home in L.A. a rubber snake, or perhaps even a live one for those who can afford it, I'm sure he would be eternally thankful and it would be a great way to thank Jim for the many hours of reading pleasure and laughs he has delivered to us all!

All the best, Jim.

Mark Alessi
Publisher & CEO, CrossGen Comics

First person who sends me a snake gets a kidney punch that'll have you peeing blood for a month, and a one-way trip to the swamps of Florida, where the snakes are very real, and sometimes even curl up in your shoe when you're not looking.

To Whom It May Concern, If Anyone:

The way I see this roast is kind of the way a guy like

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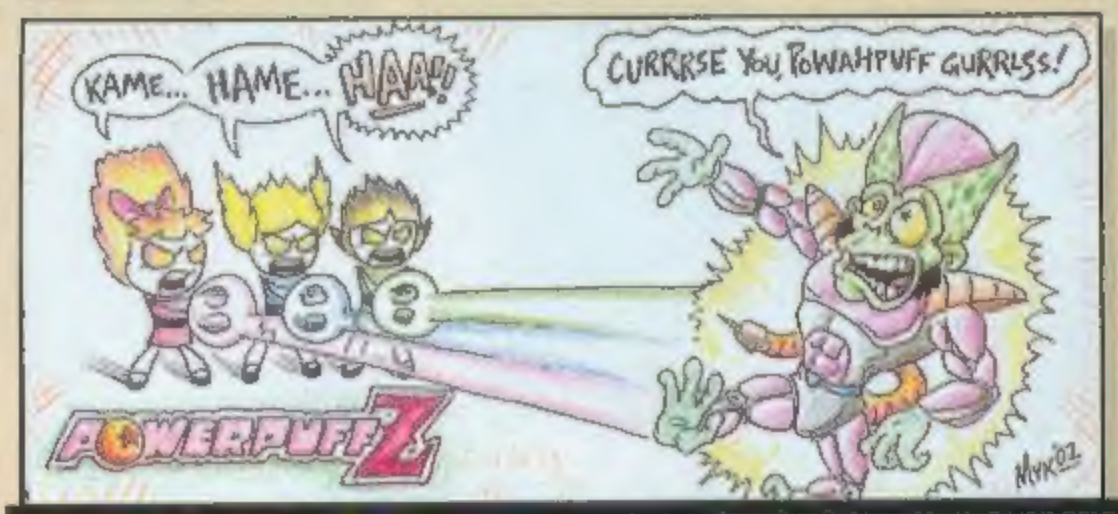
LETTER ART

The mega-talented creator of this month's best envelope takes home a copy of *Green Lantern: Circle of Fire* trade paperback, courtesy of DC Comics! Those guys are so cool for donating their stuff, we owe them bigger than Kyle Rayner owes Jim Lee for designing his new costume! Artists: Please include a clearly printed return address and a list of characters depicted on the back of the envelope.

ENVELOPE OF THE MONTH.....THE PRIZE

CAP VS. ZEMO, M. Mendez, W. Babylon, NY

CATWOMAN, Sherman McClain, Houston, TX



POWERPUFF Z, Myk Friedman, Dallas, TX

DAREDEVIL, Scott Goddard, Kansas City, MO

Michael Jackson creates the "MTV Entertainer of the Millennium" award for himself. Some people just take the "Hey look at me" syndrome to incredible new levels. Sheesh.

Anyway, a little while ago Jim surprised—perhaps shocked—everyone who knows him by getting married. It's not the getting married part that was so surprising. It was the fact he even knew a girl.

The wedding took place at Dodger Stadium in L.A.—don't ask—and once everyone got over the disappointment that this was a wedding and not free seats for a ball game, the nuptials commenced. The ceremony was very nice in a yadda-yadda sort of way, but then took a hard left turn into Stupidville when it got to the point where people were invited to share their stories about Jim.

While a few obviously inebriated types rambled on, I sat and thought for a minute about what I would say. That minute was the longest I had EVER thought about Jim. Ever. So I stayed in my seat and drank some more and had a great time talking to other people who thought the Dodgers were playing, too.

Marc Silvestri
The Top Cow of Top Cow

The minute you spent thinking about me beats the cumulative time I've spent thinking about you, Marc. By about 45 seconds.

Well, that's that. Hopefully, I'll never have to endure that kinda pain again. If I do, it'll probably be in about 30 days or so. Until then, I remain...

—Jim McLauchlin

Jim McLauchlin looked into the future and the future looked back. That rather freaked him out. (Psst! Cubs finally win it all in 2039.)

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wizard NEWS & NOTES

ALL THE NEWS WE FELT LIKE PRINTING

GEORGE GOES MONTHLY

Pérez makes CrossGen monthly debut with superhero-free 'Solus'

George Pérez wants to draw everything in his new series for CrossGen—everything, that is, *except* superheroes.

When *Solus* launches next March, the oft proclaimed "ultimate superhero artist" takes time from working on the *uber*-anticipated *JLA/Avengers* project (see sidebar) to embark on his first monthly ongoing series in over two years. And there isn't a single cape in sight.

"I've been drawing superheroes nonstop for almost 30 years," admitted Pérez. "With this past year of working on the ultimate superhero team-up, it's really nice to get my feet wet again in the fantasy arena and have a character who actually changes their clothes from time to time."

That character is the ravishing and brilliant Andra Radiant. The most renowned scientist, athlete and explorer on her planet, Andra has no memory of her past accomplishments.

"She seems to be the inspiration, if not the outright cause, of the world's progress and well-being," noted Pérez. "She's a glorified persona. While she knows that's who she is, that's all she knows about who she is."

Rather than soaking up praise she can't remember deserving, Andra resolves to uncover the truth, traveling to the various planets across the CrossGen Universe in search of her past.

"Crossing through the different planets means being able to do a lot of design work and being able to work in lots of genres I don't ordinarily get a chance to do," said Pérez. "It's the best of all worlds...literally."

The decision to go monthly with the series exemplifies Pérez's determination to challenge himself despite everything he's already accomplished.

"There is a real wear and tear on the creative juices trying to come up with something interesting month after month," explained Pérez. "But I knew that if I wanted to feel like part of the CrossGen team and maximize my return after a year's hiatus, it had to be with more than just going back to the status quo."

In many ways, *Solus* is an opportunity for Pérez to explore the less-charted areas of his creative career. While giving Pérez the female protagonist he craved and a science fiction/fantasy setting that would let his imagination run, there was still something missing.

"One of the things I've missed is being able to work with a woman writer," said Pérez. "Having worked on *Wonder Woman* with Karen Berger, I find I have a lot I identify with the female point of view, and I really wanted to work that way with someone who was intelligent and whose writing ability I respected."

Luckily, Barbara Kesel agreed to write the new series. Already fast friends, the two had previously collaborated on a Meridian story in *CrossGen Chronicles* #3.

"I like Barbara's way of thinking," praised Pérez. "While she has a good grasp of graphics, she has a lot more internal action that goes on with the characters in her stories. It creates a real challenge to convey those thoughts visually, but I like the challenge."

Once again a fulltime CrossGen employee, Pérez is on double duty, working on *Solus* during the day and drawing *JLA/Avengers* during nights and weekends. Rather than feel overwhelmed, Pérez celebrates the opportunity to work on such varied projects.

"I've been very lucky," reflected Pérez. "To be able to work on the stuff I really want to do—to do the ultimate superhero book, to do fantasy which I've been aching to do for ages—I consider myself a very fortunate artist." ■ DAVE MARSHALL

JLA/AVENGERS UPDATE

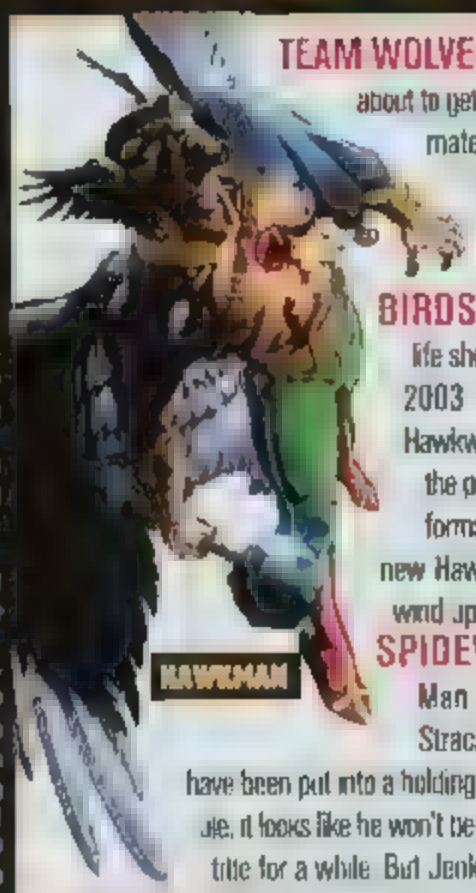
With artist George Pérez's exclusive CrossGen contract back in effect, some fans may be wondering how his work on the highly anticipated four-issue *JLA/Avengers* mini-series is going. According to Perez, it's going just fine.

"The new schedule means I'll be working twice as much as I used to," chuckles Pérez, who handles his CrossGen workload during business hours and focuses on *JLA/Avengers* nights and weekends. "I'm not as far ahead on the *Avengers/JLA* as I had hoped I would be. I'm inking my 31st page of issue #2 and I'm penciling page 36 of issue #3. I've already penciled and inked the cover of issue #1 and I've started penciling the cover of issue #2 and I've designed all of them."

While no release date has been officially set for the joint venture between Marvel and DC, the artist can't wait for fans to get a look at the series—even if the idea of living up to 20 years of anticipation scares him a little.

"Believe me, I'm glad that this project is causing such a stir," said Pérez, "I know realistically that *JLA/Avengers* has had 20 years of anticipation, which I hope I live up to." ■ MIKE COTTON & DM

THE BUZZBIN

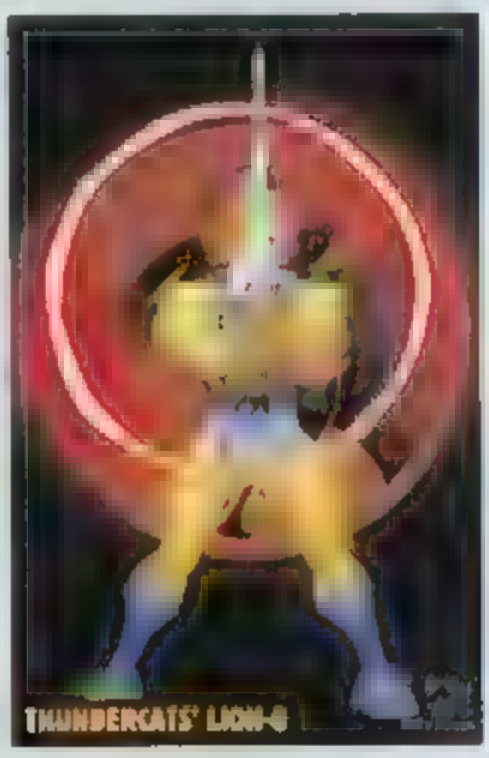


TEAM WOLVERINE Marvel's most popular mutant's about to get an overhaul in his solo title, insiders intimate. It looks like *Queen & Country* scribe Greg Rucka and *Transmetropolitan* penciller Danick Robertson are primed to take over the title by May, 2003.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER Hawkman's love life should get a lot more complicated early in 2003 when the original Thanagarian Hawkwoman, a.k.a. Shera Hall, shows up in the pages of *Hawkman*. Shera Hall's presence forms a love triangle with Carter Hall and the new Hawkgirl, Kendra Saunders. Who's gonna wind up tops in the pecking order?

SPIDEY START The long-awaited Spider-Man relaunches by writers J. Michael Straczynski, Kevin Smith and Paul Jenkins have been put into a holding pattern. With Smith's heavy film schedule, it looks like he won't be able to commit to a monthly Spider-Man title for a while. But Jenkins and Humberto Ramos are readying *Spectacular Spider-Man* for a summer relaunch.

MEN OF STEEL Mike Turner's pulling out the big guns for his new Top Cow series. Word is that he's speaking with a couple guys familiar with DC's Last Son of Krypton for the writing chores for his 2003 project.



CAT LADY With *Thundercats* emerging as a smash hit, DC is looking to keep the kitty purring with additional projects. Word on the street is that DC has its eye on *Tomb Raider Journeys*' Fiona Avery to pen a limited series starring the superheroic felines.

TRANSFORMERS VS. TOP COW Sources suggest that the kookiest '80s crossover could go down with a possible Dreamwave/Top Cow project that would have the Decepticons invading Top Cow Earth, with heroes like the Darkness and Witchblade forced to save the day. In other Transformers news, DC is reportedly courting Dreamwave aggressively in hopes of landing a Transformers/Robotech crossover.

ANTHOLOGY OF THE STORM Sources close to DC/WildStorm say the publisher plans to release a yearly, mature-reader anthology starring characters from their "Eye of the Storm" line. Rumored contributors include *100 Bullets* writer Brian Azzarello, *Transmetropolitan* writer Warren Ellis and WildStorm founder Jim Lee.

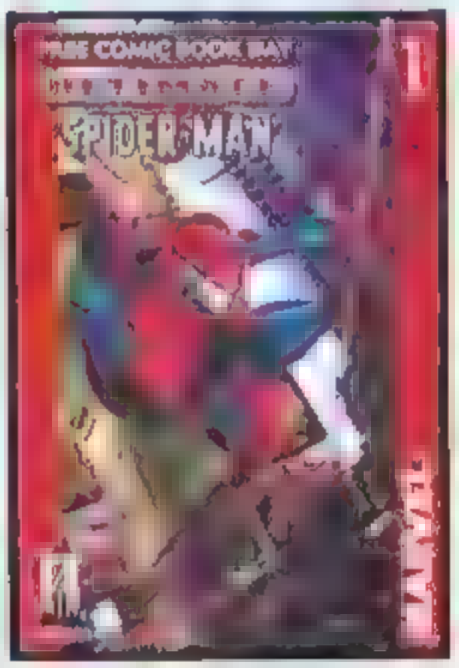
ULTIMATE CREATIVE TEAM Well, whaddya know? Back before they teamed for the chart-topping *The Ultimates*, Mark Millar and Bryan Hitch were offered *The Avengers*. The pair passed on the Assemblers, opting instead to restart them Ultimate-style.

THE MILLAR-VERSE Speaking of Millar, the top-flight writer is rumored to be shopping a small, creator-owned line of books to a number of publishers. Marvel, Top Cow and WildStorm have all shown interest.

DISTINGUISHED COMPETITION Believe it or not, Marvel Editor-in-Chief and cover artist *par excellance* Joe Quesada wants to do covers for a particular DC title! If DC allows this, the head honcho of Marvel may soon be a DC freelancer as well.

FREE-FOR-ALL

Free Comic Book Day gets date, but not without controversy



Repeating Free Comic Book Day was never a question of if, but when.

After weeks of debate and a nationwide vote, retailers have decided Free Comic Book Day 2 will be May 3, 2003, the day after "X-Men 2" hits theatres.

When 14 retailers and publishers met this summer to begin planning the second Free Comic Book Day, controversy arose over whether it should coincide with the release of "X-Men 2" in May or "The Hulk" in June. At a stalemate, event founder Joe Field drafted an argument for "X-Men 2" and Marvel E-I-C Joe Quesada made a case for "The Hulk," and the date then went up for a retailer vote.

"There was this wrestling mentality to the way the vote was put together," said Field, a retailer based in California. "With Quesada in one corner and Field in the other, it was Hulk vs. X-Men: Who will win?"

Each date had strong points, with Field citing the sequel's increased likelihood of success and Quesada pointing out the Hulk's greater accessibility to new readers. Despite widespread fan response, few retailers ultimately voted.

"While I think the process was handled fairly, the turnout was incredibly disappointing," said Quesada. "I was incredibly surprised at how few top-dollar stores actually voted."

Even with the low turnout, "X-Men 2" won by a margin of 13.5 percent, and all involved were relieved to refocus what Free Comic Book Day is really all about.

"This isn't a Joe Field promotion or a Marvel promotion," asserted Field. "This is about creating an awareness that *anybody* can walk into a store and find something they would want to come back to month after month." ■ DM

A PLACE FOR SWINGERS

With a great view comes a great price tag, as evidenced by the Greenwich Village loft from the "Spider-Man" movie, which recently hit the open market for a staggering $8.8 million. Extensively renovated since being featured as Peter Parker and Harry Osborn's bachelor pad, the two-bedroom, 2.5 bath, ninth-floor apartment features solid mahogany doors and a 2,400-bottle wine cellar. A kitchen equipped with double fridges, double stoves and double dishwashers will help you plan your Thanksgiving feast (just don't bother inviting Norman Osborn!) while the terrazzo-walled ceilings, fire fly batteries and full-fledged terrace makes this the perfect place for any New York City swinger. ■ DM

SUPERSTITION

Separating truth from fiction about upcoming 'Superman' movie

Great Scott! Not even the Man of Steel's X-ray vision could see through the walls that Warner Bros. is putting up to keep the details surrounding its upcoming big-budget "Superman" movie under wraps. What is known is that director Brett Ratner ("Red Dragon") will be helming the project that is slated for a 2004 release. With rumors surfacing faster than a speeding bullet, we decided to put you to the test to see if you can figure out what truly is Super-fact and Super-fiction.

1 The first third of the film will take place on Krypton and feature a Naboo-like futuristic society under attack by the combined forces of Brainiac and General Zod, a master of Kryptonian Kung Fu who is accompanied by his canine companion Krypto.

2 Sir Anthony Hopkins, he of flesh-eating fame in "Silence of the Lambs" and "Red Dragon," has been offered the role of Superman's pappy Jor-El and is very interested in the role.

CHAN AND TUCKER

3 A gay Jimmy Olsen develops a crush on Superman and challenges Lois Lane for our hero's affections before eventually quitting the *Daily Planet* when his advances are rebuffed.

4 Ratner's "Rush Hour" dynamic duo Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker will make cameos as two detectives the Man of Steel saves from a crew of Intergang thugs.

KEANU REEVES

5 "The Matrix" star Keanu Reeves has been considered to don the Man of Steel's red cape and tights for the lead role in the film.

6 Similar to "Futurama," CGI versions of George Reeves, Christopher Reeve and Marlon Brando's heads will appear in jars located in Krypton's Hall of Justice.

7 Reprising his role from the 1997 film "Steel," NBA superstar Shaquille O'Neal will appear as the Brainiac-controlled John Henry Irons and duke it out with the Man of Steel.

8 The film's shocking finale reveals that Superman archnemesis Lex Luthor is actually Supes' brother who lost his hair and powers as a result of radiation leaking into his space pod when he entered Earth's atmosphere.

9 In "Star Wars" like fashion, the first "Superman" film will kick off a planned three-part trilogy.

10 It's revealed early on that Superman's pappy Jor-El is actually the King of Krypton, meaning young Prince Kal-El (a.k.a. Superman) is actually of noble descent.

■ JAMES MCDONOUGH

ANSWERS: 1) False 2) True 3) False 4) True 5) False 6) True 7) True 8) False 9) True 10) True

ALSO AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 12

COLLECTOR'S DVD GIFT SET INCLUDES

DISCIPLES OF THE BLADE

'Witchblade' fans pay big cash to keep show on TV

"Witchblade" fans give a whole new meaning to the term "Must-See TV."

The Sept. 16 issue of *Variety* contained a full-page ad pleading for the continuation of the "Witchblade" TV series, based on the Top Cow comic of the same name. But the ad didn't come from the show's stars or even Top Cow itself. It came from dedicated fans.

The Witchblade Central Station fan club shelled out $3,550 for the ad after cable network TNT announced that it would not pick up "Witchblade" for a third season.

"It's a unique show. It's intelligent, complex, and it's never just black or white," said Witchblade Central Station committee member Jessica Roberts.

Witchblade Central Station made an appeal to raise money for the ad, and fans came through quickly. After only three days, a total of 61 contributors had ponied up the $3,550. "Witchblade" actors Anthony Cistaro, David Chokachi and John Hensley have also helped with public statements of support. Anyone who believes in saving the show can wear it on their sleeve—or at least your back. Free T-shirt transfers are available at **www.witchbladecentralstation.com**.

HEATINDEX

No one loves comics like *Wizard*–here's some cool things we read and saw this month.

CAPTAIN MARVEL #1 (Marvel Comics) Stepping up to Marvel prez Bill Jemas' challenge writer Peter David gives us his A-game by revealing the true burden of having cosmic awareness. What happens if you have to choose between two horrible events occurring simultaneously? And what if you stop the wrong one? The answer leaves us asking, "Where's *Captain Marvel* going next?"

GREEN LANTERN #155 (DC Comics) Judd Winick's thought-provoking "Hate Crime" storyline came to a stunning conclusion as Kyle Rayner–fed up with humanity after his assistant Terry is attacked for being gay–undergoes a self-imposed exile into space with his girlfriend, Jade. The last page of this ish got us extra psyched, as Kyle implores new GL John Stewart to "mind the store." Stewart's simple but awe-inspiring reply? "Count on it."

LOEB'S 'SMALLVILLE' (The WB) Jeph Loeb's (*Superman*) first writing assignment on "Smallville" ("Red") didn't just introduce red Kryptonite to the show's universe–it set a new standard of excellence for the series. Affected by the new strain of radiation, Clark Kent became confident, commanding and the most like Superman we've seen on "Smallville" yet. The episode emerged as a classic and we can't wait to see Loeb bring more of his comic book expertise to television.

THE WAR WITHIN (Dreamwave) Veteran *Transformers* writer Simon Furman's take on the early days of the Cybertronian society and the Autobot/Decepticon conflict combine with newcomer Don Figueroa's pre-G1 renditions of classics like Optimus Prime to form *the* Transformers story we've been waiting all these years for.

[illegible] TO DO TCJBOT!

[illegible] art chores for its upcoming

HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE!

[illegible] the adventures of globe-trotting

[illegible] Van Meach in *The Inferman*, a 128-page

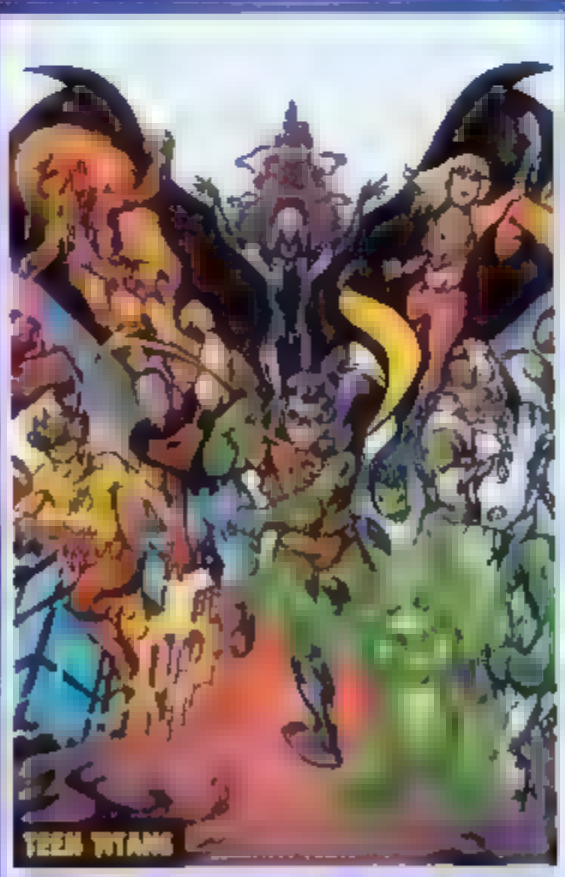
[illegible] color graphic novel [illegible] strong stories in January

[illegible] Octopus Publishing.

CUTS TO THE CORE

[illegible] FOR

[illegible] AGENTS



TITANS [illegible]

AMERICAN 'LEAGUE'

Like WW II, us Americans save your bloody Brit arses

Writer Alan Moore and penciler Kevin O'Neill made literature fun and exciting with their two *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* series, starring an eclectic mix of literary characters banding together to fight evil in 19th-century Britain. But in the U.S., we can't leave well enough alone—we've always got to Americanize our British imports, just as we did with "All in the Family," "Three's Company" and "American Idol," all big hits that were based on British TV series.

So, how would you put together an American League? Easy—base it on the *real* American literature: blockbuster movies!

INDIANA JONES

Pushing 80 but still virile and adventurous, Indiana Jones ("Raiders of the Lost Ark") is called upon by British Intelligence when its top agent, James Bond, goes rogue. Fulfilling the same role as Campion Bond plays in *League* now, Jones acts as the team's liaison with MI5.

JACK RYAN

Looking for someone to lead his new American League, Jones tracks down assistant CIA director Jack Ryan (the kick-ass Alec Baldwin version from "The Hunt for Red October"). A brilliant analyst and sometime field agent, Ryan jumps at the chance to take on the best secret agent in the spy game.

HANNIBAL LECTER

One of the most brilliant minds in the world, Dr. Hannibal Lecter ("Red Dragon") is picked to help profile Bond's motivations. Lecter would be the perfect secret agent—if it weren't for his predilection for eating the people he works with!

SARAH CONNOR

After surviving attacks from the future by a pair of almost indestructible robots, mercenary Sarah Connor ("T2") is finally at peace. But when duty calls, she grabs a shotgun and decides to join in the fight to save the world.

JOHN RAMBO

For John Rambo (the guy from "First Blood"—and not the lame-ass sequels!), his war in Vietnam ended a long time ago, but after years in a military mental institute, Rambo's assigned one last mission—kill James Bond at all costs!

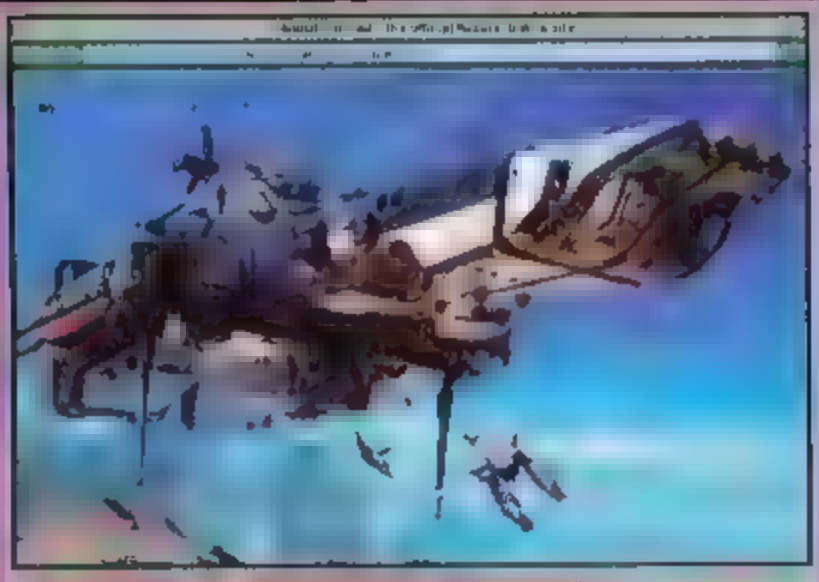
JOHN SHAFT

He's a slick private dick who gets all the chicks—and that's enough for us! An older, more distinguished Shaft (the Richard Roundtree original—damn right!) returns to his old ways of womanizing and kicking ass to take on the only man who gets more pootie than him—James Bond.

dot.comics

COOL COMICS RELATED STUFF ON THE INTERNET

SITE OF THE MONTH



THE OFFICIAL ROBOTECH WEBSITE

www.robotech.com

We've been big fans of this site since it launched in February 2001! But with WildStorm/DC's ambitious *Robotech* mini-series launching this month and TDK Mediactive's awesome *Robotech: Battlecry* video game burning up the sales charts, now is all the more reason to visit. Officially run by Robotech producers Harmony Gold, this Website is known primarily for its community pages where *Robotech* fans from all over the world can correspond with one another. But of course, it also contains a comeprehensive "Infopedia," a gallery of cool images and an online store where newbies and longtime fans alike can pick up the latest Robo-merchandise.

DECEMBER

1 *Alias: Agent Bristow* #0 (Arcade). Hot Hollywood talent J.J. Abrams makes his comic book debut with this adaptation of his hit TV show. Official site: [illegible]

4 *Bastard Samurai TP Vol. 1: Samurai Noir* (Image). If you missed it, this trade collects Mike Avon Oeming acid-out mini-series along with a bunch of cool extras. Oeming's official site: **www.mikeoeming.com**. Also, don't miss manga superstar Kia Asamiya's debut on *Uncanny X-Men* #416 (Marvel)! Comprehensive X-fansite: www.xmenarmature

11 *Aquaman* #1 (DC). The King of the Seven Seas makes his not-so-triumphant return, as he's banished from Atlantis and branded a traitor! Funny parody: www.[illegible]dooks.com/Aquaman.htm

17 "An Evening with Kevin Smith" debuts on DVD, containing footage of the director/writer's speeches given on college campuses. Cool KS movie game: [illegible]

18 "The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers" hits theaters today. At last! Gollum appears! Awesome fan site: [illegible]

25 Merry Christmas! If you haven't seen "Spirit of Christmas," the profanity-laced animation that gave birth to "South Park," watch it here [illegible]

GUILTY PLEASURE OF THE MONTH

ebaumsworld.com/minigolf.html

5 QUESTIONS WITH... BRIAN PULIDO

Lady Death lives! Next February, Chaos! Comics Diva of Death is resurrected via an all-new monthly series called *Brian Pulido's Lady Death: A Medieval Tale* from CrossGen Entertainment, written by Pulido and penciled by former *LD* artist Ivan Reis.

Lady Death's resurrection comes mere months after Pulido filed Chapter 7 bankruptcy, which forced him to auction off all his characters—CrossGen purchased Lady Death prior to bankruptcy proceedings—and close down Chaos!

Wizard caught up with Pulido to discuss the CrossGen Lady Death (No, she won't get a Sigil tattoo, Pulido insists), his relationship with the company (he won't be relocating from Arizona to Florida) and the post-bankruptcy aftermath.

WIZARD: What's happening with the new Lady Death?

PULIDO: This is going to be a big medieval fantasy slash saga. The character Hope, who later becomes Lady Death, is the offspring of two distinct races, one human and one is what I call Eldritch—these near-immortal creatures. Where the conflict comes in is that human beings are conquering new lands and they're encroaching into this magical Eldritch realm. The Eldritch look at human beings the way we consider rats or cockroaches, something that needs to be stamped out. Lady Death fits in neither realm and winds up being an adventurer who is zipping all over the place doing what she sees fit.

How will the series conform to CrossGen's s[illegible]e for all a[illegible] philosophy?

I looked at certain CrossGen books like *Sojourn* and *The Path* as measures of how violent and non-violent I can be. I think most people know that there is going to be some degree of violence because it's the nature of the story. As far as the boobs thing, there is a complete de-emphasis there.

Many people are upset that you've l[illegible]d at CrossGen so s[illegible] after filing bankruptcy. How do you respond?

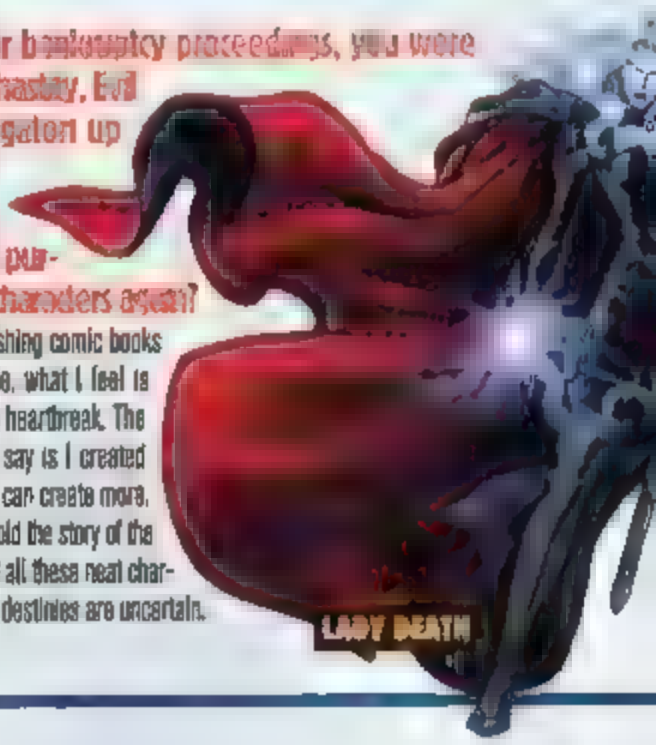
Chaos! Comics was no longer viable and no longer solvent. I wasn't out there with an agenda to dump my company—that's absurd. I was actively attempting to sell the company or get investors, which I was unable to do. Blame me if it makes people feel better, but there's no way on God's green Earth I woke up every day and did anything less than my absolute best to try to turn it around.

Do you think you'll ever be able to work again with the f[illegible] fancers Chaos! owes money to?

I really don't know. You'd have to look at that on a case-by-case basis. I am working with Ivan Reis, the former artist on *Lady Death* who is owed money by Chaos! Comics. I think they have a reasonable point of view that it wasn't like I had an agenda. Do I feel good about it? No, it's absolutely heartbreaking. Now out of that remaining portion, are there people who wish me nothing but harm? Of course, but it's human, it's understandable.

As part of your bankruptcy proceedings, you were forced to put Chastity, Evil Ernie and Purgation up for auction. Do you have any interest in purchasing those characters again?

I can't foresee publishing comic books again. Honestly dude, what I feel is complete shock and heartbreak. The one thing that I can say is I created those [characters], I can create more. Ultimately it's sad: I told the story of the universe and created all these neat characters and now their destinies are uncertain. It's sad.



MARVELLEGENDSWAVE2

After several long months of waiting, Toy Biz's second wave of Marvel Legends figures ($7.99 each) has arrived in stores. Featuring incredibly detailed sculpts and insane amounts of articulation, these toys are the crème de la creme of superhero action figures. Following the first wave that featured Iron Man, Captain America, Hulk and Toad, Toy Biz now offers up Namor, The Sub-Mariner, Thing, Dr. Doom and the Human Torch. We decided to see which figure rules in four major categories: Sculpt, Paint, Base and Articulation

BEST SCULPT: SUB-MARINER

Toy Biz perfectly captured every subtle nuance of Namor's body and face, including the piercing eyes, razor-sharp cheekbones and elfin ears. Plus, Namor's sporting his under-used and under-appreciated black costume, and with his amazing water base, can ride the waves like a true Atlantean monarch.

BEST PAINT: THING

It's clobberin' time! To quote one awestruck *Wizard* staffer, "Wow! It looks like they rolled him in dirt." And that's the point. Toy Biz pulled out all the stops on the paint for Benjamin J. Grimm, giving that ever-lovin' blue-eyed Thing a grainy, dingy color scheme that mirrors the rocky, craggy look and feel of his comic book counterpart.

BEST BASE: DR. DOOM

The doctor is in and damn does he look fine. The Dr. Doom figure captures the power of Victor Von Doom, but what really stands out about Doom is his eerie Latverian castle base, which contains the sculpted visage of the only love of the dictator's life (besides himself that is), his mommy.

BEST ARTICULATION: HUMAN TORCH

With a Spider-Man-style body, this version of the FF's resident hothead has enough points of articulation to put him in all sorts of cool flame-throwin' poses. Now hook him to his fiery base and you've got an airborne Johnny Storm who looks ready to turn up the heat. Flame On!

NEIL GAIMAN WINS LAWSUIT WITH McFARLANE

Jury awards Gaiman joint interest in three characters and $45,000 judgment

Sandman creator Neil Gaiman and *Spawn* creator Todd McFarlane's long legal battle looks like it's over—well, at least the first round.

In the nearly year-long case, a Wisconsin jury awarded Gaiman joint copyright interest in Medieval Spawn, Cogliostro and Angela, all of which Gaiman created for McFarlane's Spawn line of comics and toys. The jury also awarded Gaiman $45,000, plus court costs, in damages for the unauthorized use of his name and biography.

An arbitration was ordered by the court to determine both Todd McFarlane Productions' and Image's profits to date from the disputed characters and publications since their inception. This most likely will include profits from the toyline, the HBO "Spawn" cartoon series and the "Spawn" movie. Reportedly, McFarlane may end up owing Gaiman hundreds of thousands of dollars.

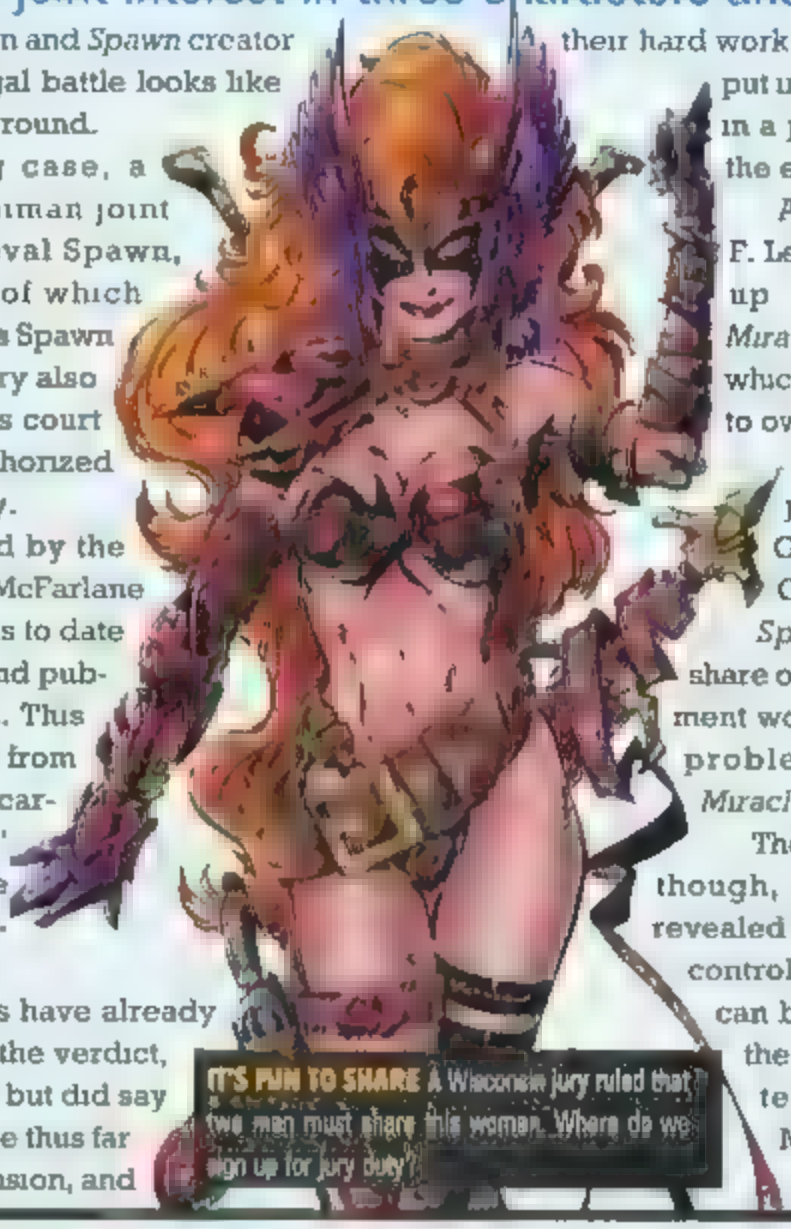
Since McFarlane's attorneys have already stated that they plan to appeal the verdict, Gaiman cannot discuss the trial but did say he was satisfied with the outcome thus far.

"I appreciated the jury's decision, and their hard work. I was proud of the work and effort put in by my legal team," wrote Gaiman in a prepared statement. "I regret that the entire business was necessary."

According to Gaiman's attorney Ken F. Levin, the verdict still does not clear up the long disputed rights to *Miracleman*, the comic book character, which both Gaiman and McFarlane claim to own.

Levin explained that while the jury did find that McFarlane and Gaiman had a 1997 contract in which Gaiman would trade his rights to the *Spawn* characters for McFarlane's share of Miracleman, enforcing that agreement would not have cleared up all of the problems surrounding publishing *Miracleman* again.

The Miracleman rights issue isn't dead though, according to Levin. The lawyer revealed that Gaiman still plans to fight for control of Miracleman so that old stories can be republished, Gaiman can finish the last Miracleman story he has yet to tell, and creators who worked on Miracleman over the years can be paid royalties. ■ MK



WRITE OR WRONG, DC CANS LETTERS

If a fan writes a letter, but there's no letter column around to print it, will anybody even notice?

Such is the conundrum facing fans since DC announced the permanent discontinuation of letter's pages.

"It turned out to be a big help that editors already knew my name and associated it with print-worthy material," recalled letterhack-turned- superstar writer Kurt Busiek. "They read my submissions with more of an expectation that my stories would be usable."

While creators often cite similar stories about letter writing, many also admit their transition to online forums in recent years. DC noted the proliferation of Internet message boards and the instant gratification they offer as contributing to the demise of printed letters.

"We did have a great deal of discussion in-house about the change from the regular letter columns to our new information pages," said Richard Bruning, DC's VP/Creative Director. "With the option and predominance of the Internet message boards, we're seeing a new and better way to have more immediate and interactive exchanges of opinion and commentary." ■ DM

AVERY'S 'STAR' RISES

Top Cow title back with JMS' blessing

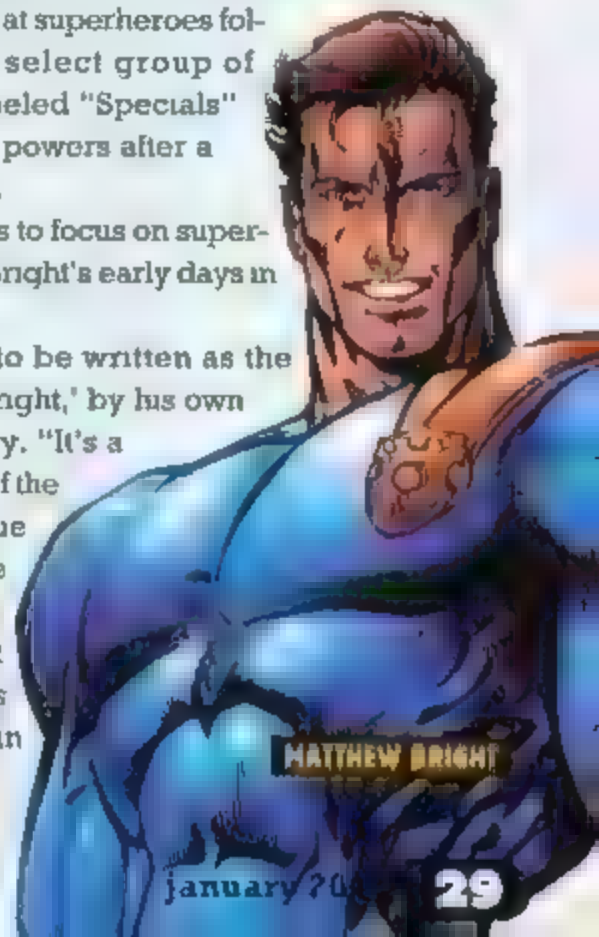
Mike Turner and Marc Silvestri aren't the only Top Cow stars making a comeback in 2003.

In March, the company's critically acclaimed *Rising Stars* returns with *Bright*, a three-issue mini-series by Fiona Avery (*Tomb Raider: Journeys*, *Rogue: Icons*) with an artist to be determined.

The original *Rising Stars* marked superscribe J. Michael Straczynski's (*Amazing Spider-Man*) Top Cow comic debut with a "real world" look at superheroes following the lives of a select group of superhuman being labeled "Specials" born with superhuman powers after a meteorite crash landed.

The new series plans to focus on superpowered cop Matthew Bright's early days in the NYPD.

"This one's going to be written as the 'Memoirs of Matthew Bright,' by his own hand," explained Avery. "It's a more detailed account of the story recounted in issue #4. We will get to see some of his closest friends, some of his most intimate moments and his unrevealed soft spots in this one." ■ JMD

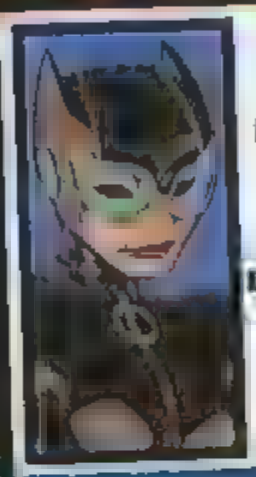


LAST CAT STANDING

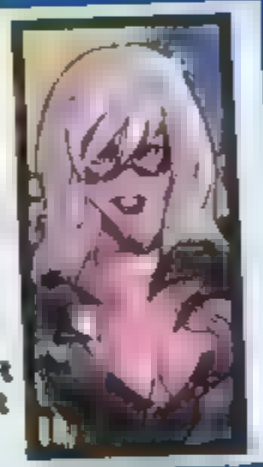
comic battles you never thought you'd see

CATWOMAN VS. BLACK CAT

THE COMBATANTS



5'7"	[illegible]	5'10"
125lbs	[illegible]	120lbs
62"	[illegible]	70"
BATMAN	[illegible]	SPIDER-MAN
BULL-WHIP	[illegible]	CHOKER COLLAR



Origins... A part-time cat burglar and adventurer, Selina Kyle currently operates as Catwoman in the mean streets of Gotham, looking out for her street people while keeping an eye out for any "pigeon" she can pluck!

Felicia Hardy followed in her father's footsteps by becoming a cat burglar. Retired from adventuring until recently, she returned to New York investigating an old friend's murder and once again became the Black Cat!

the battle... On the trail of the drug lord known as Mr. Brownstone, the Black Cat follows a hot lead to Gotham City's East End—which happens to be Catwoman's stomping grounds! With her fur up and claws extended, Selina swoops down on a rooftop to investigate this invading feline... and the catfight is on! Snapping her bullwhip to give Felicia a little taste of leather, Selina draws first blood. But a second whip crack misses the mark as Felicia leaps a good six feet in the air unloading a roundhouse kick that snaps Selina's head back like it sat on a swivel! Selina clears the cobwebs and leaps to her feet, raking her claws across Felicia's midsection and drawing even more blood. Felicia counters by smashing her grappling hook across Selina's skull, a blow that leaves her seeing little birdies. Felicia softens up Selina with some punches to the face, but before the beating can intensify Selina gets her whip around Felicia's neck and flings her to one side. Pouncing like a panther, Selina lands a straight kick to Felicia's midsection, follows up with a haymaker, then finishes her off with a spinning side kick that almost decapitates the Black Cat. Ensnaring her fallen foe, Catwoman trusses up the Black Cat, but not before one last dig. "Next time, kitten, don't come sniffing around the big cat's litter box. You're lucky I didn't spay you." (w)

With a bigger budget and eye-popping special effects, **"X-Men 2"** promises a peek into Wolverine's Weapon X connection, an invasion of the Xavier Institute and the debut of Nightcrawler

By Mike Cotton

Back For SEC

NOS

THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS 1. Professor X and his students take a field trip to a local museum; 2. Kea Wong debuts as Jubilee; 3. Magneto (Ian McKellen) prepares to escape from his cell; 4. Stryker (Brian Cox), a human militant who wants to wipe out mutants, storms the X-mansion.

Storm's long white hair sways from shoulder to shoulder as she marches alongside fellow X-Man Jean Grey down the aisles of Vancouver's St. Andrew's-Wesley Church. Grey's outstretched hand strains forward as if she's desperately grasping for an object just inches from her palm.

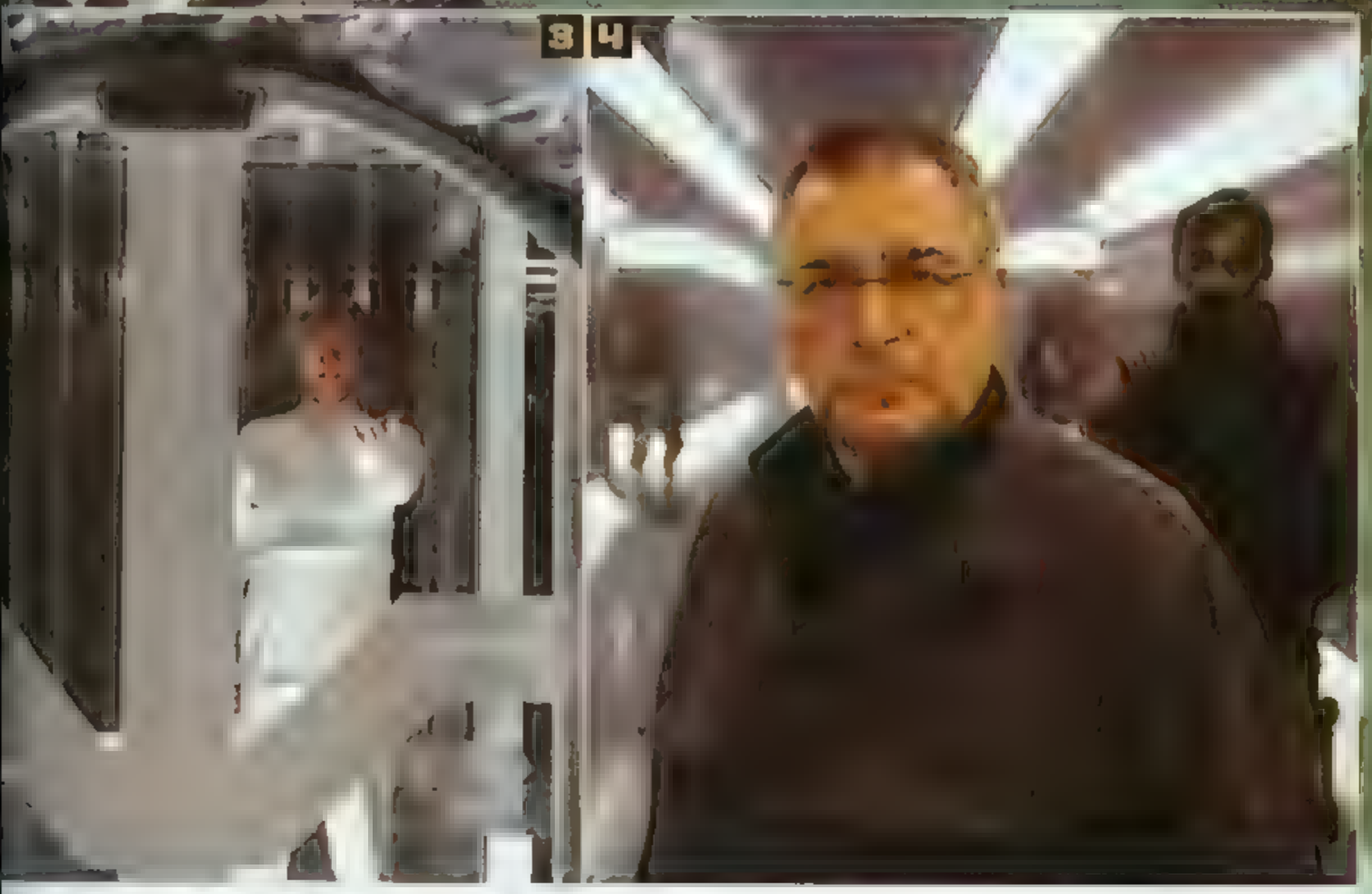
The two heroines move s owly and deliberately down the church's wide berth, stalking past pews and stained-glass windows as they inch closer and closer to a shadowy figure in front of them. Upside down, frozen before them is someone...strike that...something...that just tried to kill the President of the United States. His name is Nightcrawler and he's currently the most feared mutant in the world

Dressed in an outfit that only a carnival performer could pull off purple striped pants and a thick brown leather vest covered by a knee-length black overcoat—Nightcrawler doesn't boast the appearance of a monster, creature of the night or assassin, he seems scared almost terrified.

Jean's eyes grow intense as she and Storm creep within a few feet of the blue, pointy-eared creature they've just captured. The duos' long leather dusters barely graze the floor as Grey uti izes her telekinetic power to slowly rotate the figure in front of her. As the figure comes into full view Nightcrawler's sharp white fangs and the raised, ritualistic tattoos that cover his blue face burst into focus.

"Please, don't k l me," N ghtcrawler says in a thick German accent. "I didn't mean to hurt anyone."

Storm's eyes go from cautious to caring as she asks, "Who are you?"



"Wagner," responds the creature, in a line fans are sure to quote for years to come. "My name is Kurt Wagner."

Suddenly, the redheaded mutant, better known as actress Famke Janssen ("Don't Say a Word"), breaks character and interrupts the scene, turning to director Bryan Singer and asking, 'Should I turn my hand as he rotates towards me, Bryan?"

"No, I don't think so," replies the 34-year-old director. "You've stopped him. Everything else is mental."

As the two continue to discuss the scene, Oscar winner Halle Berry ("Monster's Ball"), a.k.a. the weather-controlling mutant Storm, steps out of frame to chat with two fans who won an Internet contest to spend a day—which has turned into a late night—with the star.

Trying to get in another shot before an 11 p.m. dinner break, Singer turns his attention to Alan Cumming, who is still suspended from a dolly motionless and upside down in the middle of the church as Nightcrawler, the newest addition to next year's "X-Men 2" film.

"If we could go again now, I'd like to," says Cumming ("Spy Kids") in his soft Scottish accent, as he stretches upwards toward his foot that is fastened to the apparatus. "It's too much work to go up and down. I can go again if everyone else can."

As everyone moves back into place, Singer rubs his eyes in this, his fifth hour on set, which began even earlier with a meeting between producers and writers.

'I had throat surgery awhile ago," laments Singer as he signals for the cameras to prepare for shooting. "My doctor told me not to drink any caffeine. We'll see how long that lasts."

As Singer stretches his chronically sore back, the weight of making a highly anticipated sequel, complete with 18-hour days of shooting, becomes readily apparent.

In fact, it's almost ironic that Singer and crew find themselves shooting in a church because it'll take almost divine intervention to make a film as highly praised and loved by fans as the original "X-Men." But Singer's not worried about making a movie as good as "X-Men"—he plans to make a better one.

STRYKER EMERGES AS TOP VILLAIN

"The first film almost seems like a trailer now," admits Singer as he walks from the set to his luxurious trailer. "We had to introduce the world and the characters. Now that that's done, we can do so much more. I don't have to explain who everyone is; you already know. Now doing a scene to introduce Kurt Wagner, there's a joy to that. It's fun to do, because I've got these 12 other characters introduced already. I don't even have to tell you that Kurt's a mutant; you know he's a mutant if you saw 'X-Men 1.' And even if you haven't seen 'X-Men' this movie will make sense, but if you've seen it then it's the next step."

It's a big step to say the least. With a budget that could top $125 million, "X-Men 2" looks to be the biggest, most ambitious comic book film ever produced, even bigger than "Spider-Man," which went on to gross over $800 million at the box office worldwide and got the green light thanks to the $57 million opening of the original "X-Men."

And Singer can't wait to flex the new muscle a bigger budget buys him.

"The number one thing we've got with more money was more visual effects," says Singer. "We've got a longer shooting schedule. I can do more finessing. I've got more resources for set construction, more practical effects, more flexibility. Budget and schedule are always an issue but now I'm not constantly worried. With this film, I'm thinking about the budget and schedule 90 percent of the time instead of 100 percent of the time. And like the first film, we're still trying to make a much bigger movie than we have money for, which is always a challenge."

And the bigger budget also brought a bigger story for Singer and company. While the director remains tight-lipped, some very

interesting tidbits about the seque have slipped out. But don't expect Singer to respond to any of them

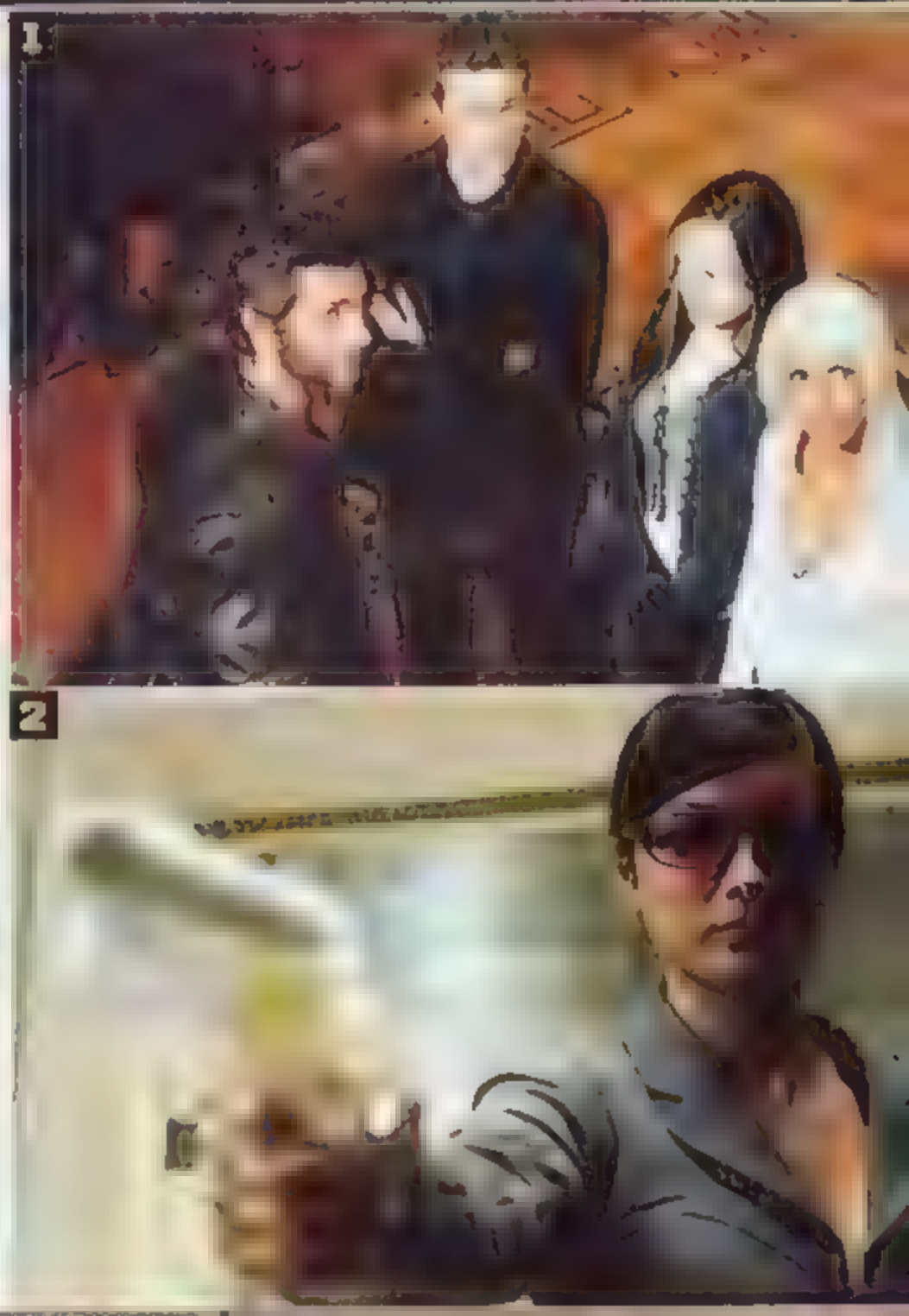
"It's the story of a progressing war on a new breed of humanity," says the director slyly. "That would be it."

But just because he's not talking about the story doesn't mean others aren't.

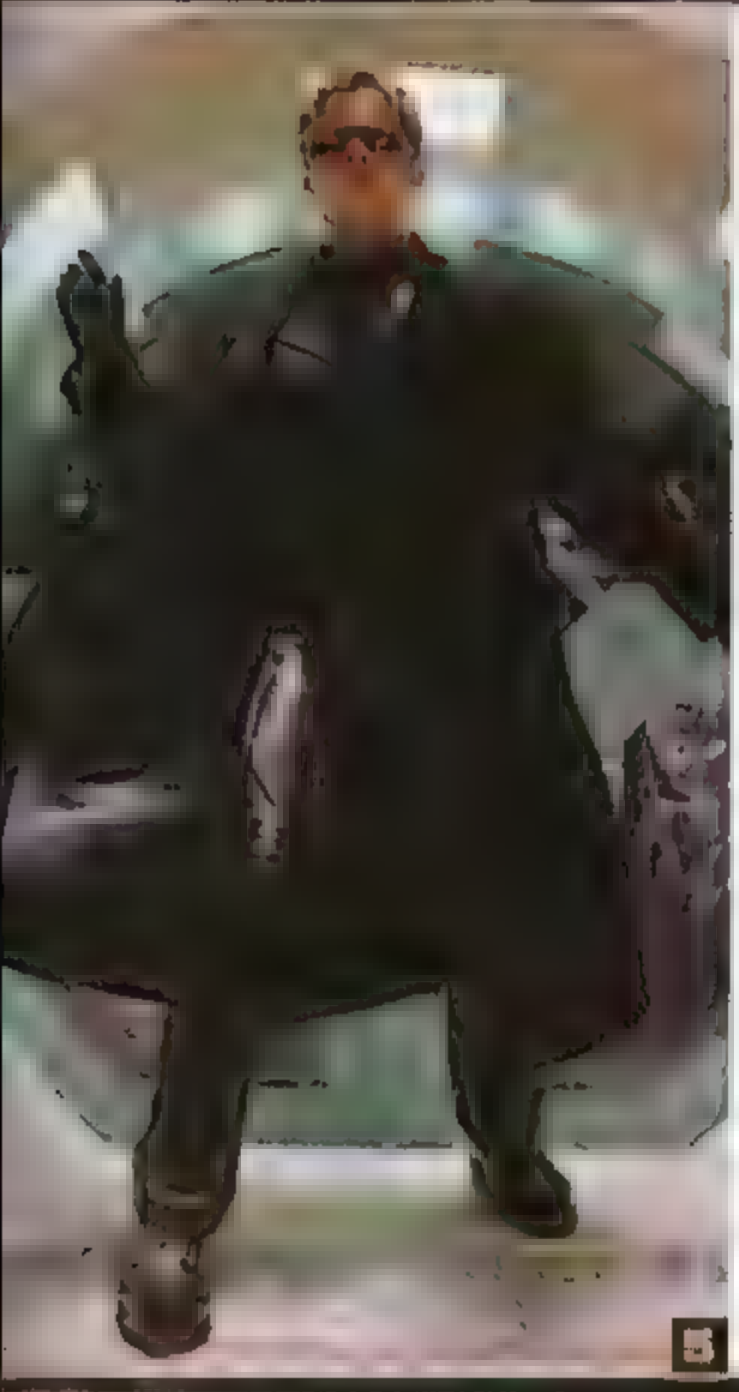
Penned primarily by Singer, newcomer Michael Dougherty, Dan Harris ("Imaginary Heroes") and David Hayter ("X-Men," "Hulk"), "X-Men 2" revolves around an increasing tension between humans and mutants with the X-Men caught in the middle

Returning to the cast are all the principal actors from the original "X-Men" film, except Tyler Mane (Sabretooth) and Ray Park (Toad). Ian McKellen ("The Lord of the Rings") reprises his role as the X-Men's oldest and most vicious foe, Magneto. Patrick Stewart ("Star Trek: The Next Generation") also returns as Professor Xavier, who was not only Singer's choice but also the top choice by fans to play the X-Men's wheelchair-bound leader. Also back are James Marsden ("Disturbing Behavior") as the X-Men's field leader Cyclops, Oscar winner Anna Paquin ("The Piano") as Rogue, Hugh Jackman ("Swordfish") as the X-Men's most popular and mysterious character, Wolverine and Rebecca Romijn-Stamos ("Rollerball") as Mystique, Magneto's only returning associate

According to Singer, the sequel introduces William Stryker—not Magneto—as the main villain, a military character who's decided to eliminate the mutant problem with extreme prejudice. Stryker played by Brian Cox ("Manhunter"), reportedly will be tied to Wolverine's origin in the Weapon X program, as well as have a very personal reason for



TEACHER'S PETS 1. Wolverine (Hugh Jackman) and Storm (Halle Berry) confer with Iceman (Shawn Ashmore) and Rogue (Anna Paquin); 2. Kelly Hu plays Stryker's hired gun Yuriko; 3. Alan Cumming debuts as Nightcrawler; 4. Wolverine's ready to hand out detention slips; 5. Cyclops (James Marsden) shows off a new look.



wanting mutants wiped out.

"Stryker introduces the human element to the war," reveals Singer. "He's the third side we didn't see in the first film."

Originally, rumors swirled through the comics community that "X-Men 2" would be an adaptation of Chris Claremont and Brent Anderson's 1983 X-Men graphic novel *God Loves, Man Kills*, but that's not the case, according to Singer.

"I liked the graphic novel and I liked some of the characters in it, you know?" says Singer. "Nightcrawler's in it. There's a Stryker character in it, who's a religious character. But no, this film's not really based on it, not at all. I liked the piece. I really liked the title, too. It's a great title. But it has very little to do with the film we're making."

While most other p ot details are kept under tighter security than Anna Kournikova's underwear drawer, a few exciting plot points have leaked.

Look for Kelly Hu ("The Scorpion King") as Yuriko, an Asian assassin who works for Stryker's organization and reportedly has ties to Wolverine.

Also, expect to see Xavier's school invaded by Stryker's forces, Wolverine's origin in the Weapon X program revealed, Storm take a more pro-mutant/anti-human stance, a bigger focus on young X-Men Rogue, Iceman (Shawn Ashmore) and Pyro (Aaron Stanford) and new X-characters including Nightcrawler and cameos by Beast and Colossus.

"[Nightcrawler] starts off as this kind of nasty piece of work," grins Cumming, as he's painted blue for an upcoming scene. "You'll see him be this kind of assailant. At the start of the film, he causes quite a bit of havoc in the White House. The idea of flying around, killing people with my tail—that kind of appealed to me."

With a new villain and a few new X-Men, fans demand to know, where's Wolverine? Right where he should be—in the middle of it all, according to Singer.

WOLVERINE'S TROUBLED PAST

According to sources within 20th Century Fox, Marvel Studios and even the "X-Men 2" cast, Jackman's Wolverine is very much the center of the sequel and the focus of much of the action in the fi m.

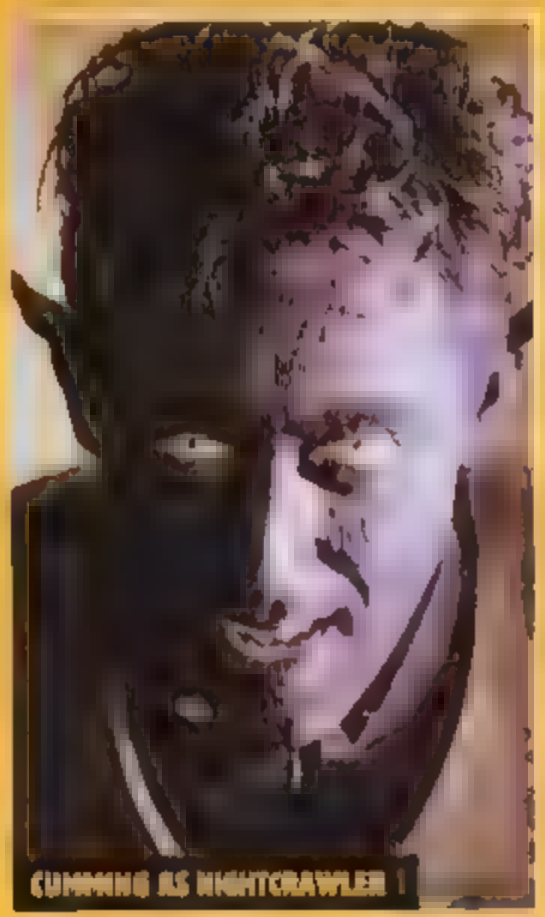
"You would think, looking at some of the reputations and egos and award

'CUMMING' OUT PARTY

Meet the latest mutant sensation from 'X Men 2'

Hanging from one leg about three feet over a hardwood floor isn't the way Alan Cumming usually does interviews–but this isn't the kind of film the 37-year old Scotsman usually works on either.

Better known for his independent film work in movies such as "The Anniversary Party," Cumming is a classically trained actor, but that doesn't mean he's not excited to play Nightcrawler, the newest addition to the roster of mutants in "X Men 2." In fact, even with blood rushing to his freshly painted blue head in a scene that requires him to be held upside down by a dolly, Cumming can't stop talking about his favorite new mutant.



CUMMING AS NIGHTCRAWLER

***WIZARD*: What was it about portraying Nightcrawler that attracted you to "X-Men 2"?**

CUMMING: The whole idea of being in a dark superhero film was quite amusing. And I like that it's got a strong moral track about acceptance. I didn't know anything about the X-Men movie until after I read the script. I hadn't seen the first one yet. There were just scenes in [the script] that I didn't think would be in an action film at all. And then of course the idea of flying around, killing people with my tail–that kind of appealed to me."

Did anyone give you X-Men comics to read?

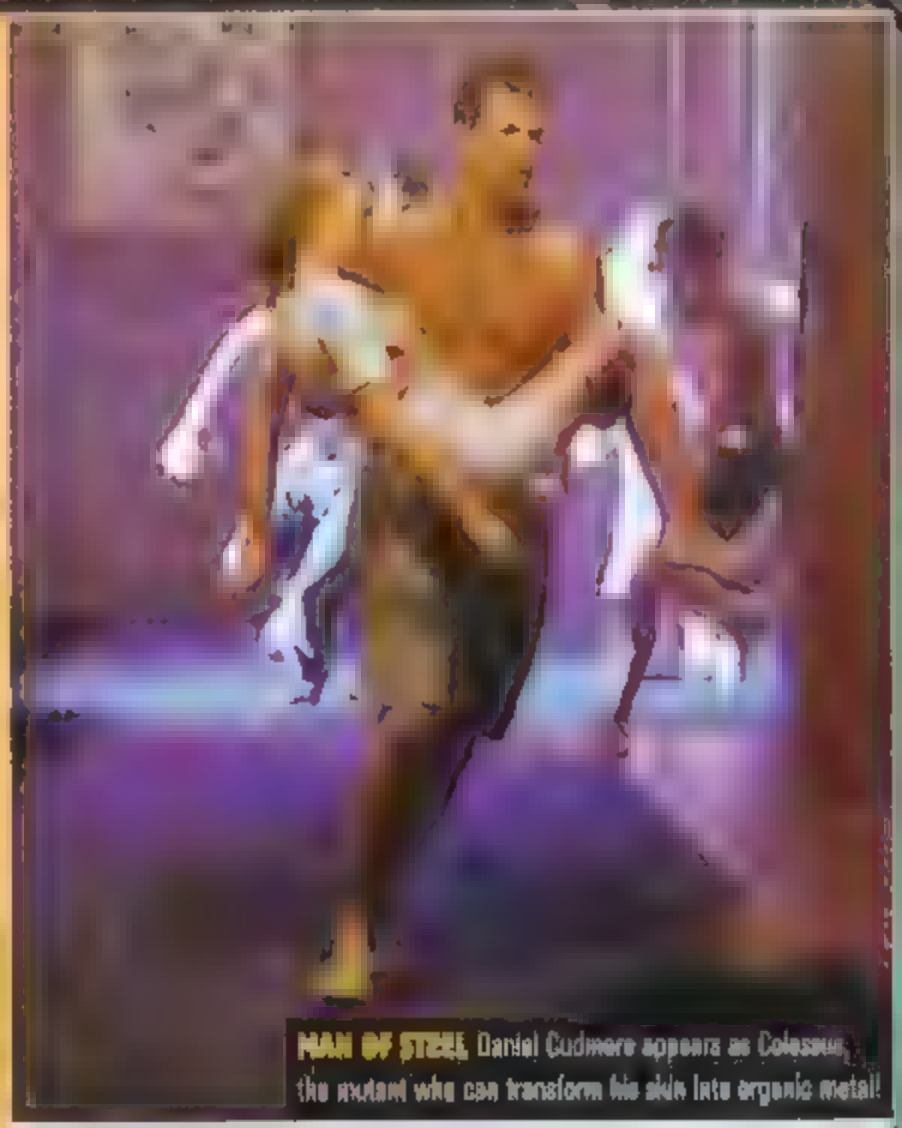
Yeah, they gave me some stuff. They gave me some sketches as well. It helped us decide on a look for him. I got the comics where he first appeared. But there was lots I didn't know. Like I just found out this week that Mystique is my mum. No one ever told me that!

How long does it take to get the makeup for Nightcrawler done?

It takes three or four hours but it depends if you have a break. I know that if I got my teeth and beard it, it'll be over sooner. But having two people all over you for a few hours drives me mad. And every time you go for a take they put the contacts in, they redo your makeup constantly. When I had my top off it took 12 hours to do my body. I told Bryan [Singer], "Nightcrawler is never taking off his clothes again."

What's Bryan Singer like to work with?

He's good. He leaves you on your own, which I quite like, especially on a film like this. He only says stuff to you when he absolutely has to. He knows what he wants and that's a good thing. It's always hard when people don't know what they want. Even when Bryan doesn't know what he wants, he knows it when he sees it. He is a big X-Men geek and he knows everything about them. It seems like it's been his dream to make a film like this. And that's quite endearing. ■ MC



MAN OF STEEL Daniel Cudmore appears as Colossus, the mutant who can transform his skin into organic metal!

winners, not to mention beautiful women and quite decent-looking men as well, that this would be a receipt for a lot of tension, but it just hasn't happened," says Stewart. "It became an ensemble almost immediately—although Hugh has come out as our leading man, which is wonderful because he's a natural."

Similar to the highly successful *Origin* mini-series from Marvel Comics, "X-Men 2" will focus on Wolverine's troubled—and mysterious—past.

"You'll see quite a bit of Wolverine's past," claims Singer. "There will be some cool sequences."

Reportedly, after Stryker's forces invade the Xavier School and capture some members of the team, Wolverine and a small band of X-Men escape, which leads the six-clawed Canadian into events that will reveal how he came to be part of the Weapon X project as well as acquire his unbreakable skeleton and claws.

Iceman reportedly will have a bigger role and fit in as Rogue did in the first film—as Wolverine's sidekick, providing a lighter element to contrast Wolverine's dark, brooding persona.

One thing Wolverine won't be involved in is any kind of work in the X-Men's famed Danger Room, where the team trains in the comic books.

While early plans for "X-Men 2" did include a Danger Room sequence—which would have seen Wolverine do some solo training against missiles, razor-sharp blades and a constantly moving and unstable floor—the scene had to be cut because of budget constraints. *Ultimate X-Men* artist Adam Kubert even did early design and storyboard work for a possible Danger Room scene before the idea was scuttled.

According to Singer, he still loves the idea of a Danger Room scene and hopes that if all goes well with "X-Men 2," fans might see the training area in "X-Men 3."

"Believe me, if the idea of the Danger Room had worked in this movie, it'd be in the movie," admits the director. "You choose your battles in terms of money and time. And it's something that perhaps can be explored in a third film. It would be a lot of fun." But as the long night of shooting wears on, which has turned into

'X' EFFECTS

Nightcrawler, Cerebro among 800 visual effects

Michael Fink stopped counting a long time ago.

As the visual effects supervisor for "X-Men 2" can tell you. There are just too many visual effects shots in the highly anticipated sequel to think about.

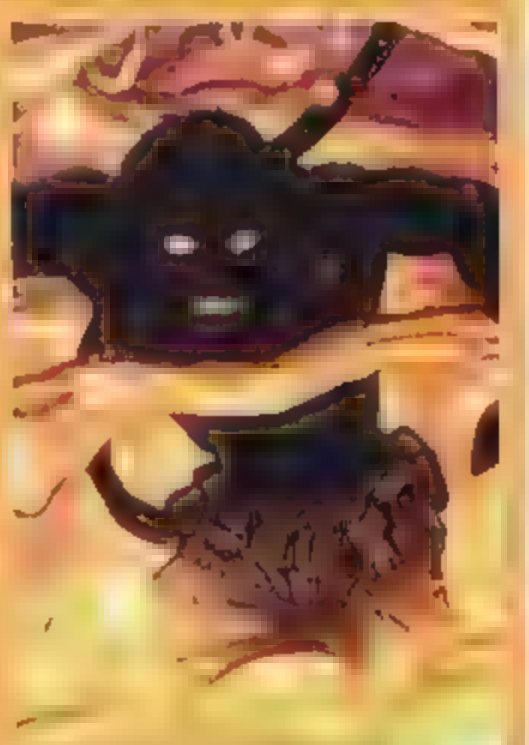
"We're definitely doing more than your normal feature film," says Fink on the set of "X-Men 2." The average film might have between 1,400 and 2,000 cuts. But with us having 800 or more effects shots, that means half the movie might have some type of visual effects shot. You don't see that too often."

JEAN GREY USING CEREBRO

As he observes a scene in a Vancouver church, Fink's scoping out just how he'll make Nightcrawler teleport from place to place. This is no easy task, since so many fans feel they know exactly what the furry blue mutant's teleportations should look and sound like after years of comic book appearances.

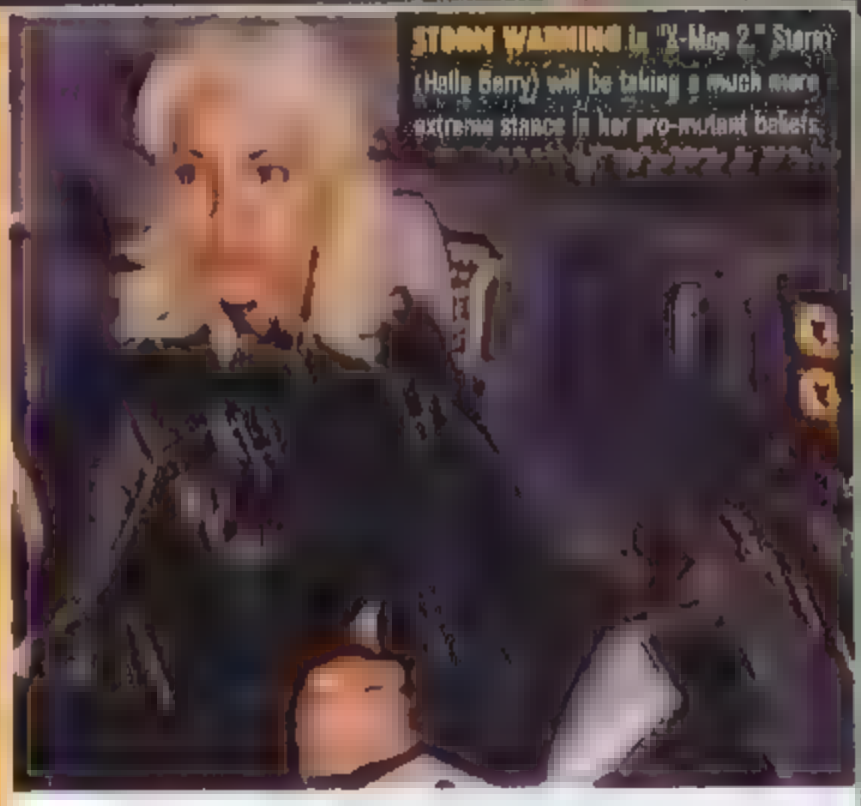
"The BAMFing will look a lot better than it does in the comics and we are using a lot of comic book reference for this," explains Fink. "Like we did with the first movie, we want to respect the design of the characters. The audience is made up of fans and we don't try to change too much. So he'll BAMF and there will be this puff of smoke. As I told [director] Bryan [Singer], if you imagine a body disappearing in the middle of a room then there would be a vacuum and all of the smoke left behind would be sucked into that vacuum. I think it'll be very cool."

Fink's also in charge of placing a tail on actor Alan Cumming, who plays the demonic looking Nightcrawler. The tail, which will be totally computer generated in postproduction, is represented by a small LED device on Cumming's rear, which lets Fink know where the tail should be and where it should move throughout filming.


NIGHTCRAWLER TELEPORTING

According to Fink, whose next job is to scout locations in Canada's snow-covered northern country for the movie's ending, "There are so many visual effects in 'X-Men 2' that it's tough to pick out the biggest.

"There isn't really a biggest visual effect," says Fink. "If you do 100 visual effects shots, then you can say, 'Oh, this is the biggest.' But in the multiple hundreds then you wind up with sequences that are bigger than others or harder. So Cerebro is the most challenging in my opinion. It's not like putting an airplane in the sky; people know what that's supposed to look like. But with Cerebro it's all interpretive and people will have an opinion on whether it looks right or not." ■ MC


STORM WARNING In "X-Men 2," Storm (Halle Berry) will be taking a much more extreme stance in her pro-mutant beliefs.

5 a.m. on a Saturday morning, there's not a whole lot of fun—just weary eyes—to be had on the X-Men set.

WHY SINGER LOVES PROF. X

Singer's had enough

With the early morning light beginning to trickle through the stained-glass windows that surround the church, and an upside-down Cumming begging for aspirin, the director finally decides he's done all he can in one night—which turns out to be just one scene.

As he rubs his sore back and stretches in his chair, Singer wonders out loud, "When do we have to have this place put back together?" he says looking around at the rigging and rearranged pews scattered around his set. "Just before Sunday? We've got time, right?"

Producer Lauren Shuler Donner reminds the director that there's a wedding in the church later that same day.

Singer smiles.

"Do you think anyone who goes to this church on Sunday morning would believe a blue demon was hanging from the ceiling tonight?" snickers Singer. "I wonder if they'd be freaked out by that. I think they would. Wouldn't you?"

Singer's almost giddy weariness shows just how tough making "X-Men 2" has become. The studio, fans and even his cast are all relying on the director to keep the "X-Men" franchise alive. In fact, a healthy rivalry has even arisen between "X-Men" and "Spider-Man" in terms of hype, excitement and most importantly, box-office revenue.

Maybe it's just the early morning hour and the long night behind him, but Singer begins to ponder just how lonely Professor Xavier must feel as the leader of the X-Men. Singer can relate.

"I think Xavier's my favorite character, only because he's in charge," says Singer with a smile. "Being a director, you're the captain of the ship and I've always had an affection for people in that lonely place. And believe me, it is a very lonely place. It's a very exciting place sometimes but you're definitely on your own in many ways. People are always looking to you for guidance. And I think when you're trying to create something—something special and unique like we are—well, that's what Professor Xavier is trying to do, too."

MAKING HIS

by Jim McLauchlin

A self-professed Marvel zombie, director Mark Steven Johnson has jam-packed 'Daredevil' with enough Easter eggs and surprise cameos to make a fanboy's head explode

Daredevil may be blind, but even he could picture this scene: A 9-year-old kid bolts into the corner drugstore in a sleepy little river town on the day new comics arrive. As the bundles are snapped loose, the kid bounces off the walls with anticipation. He even offers to help put them into the spinner rack, just so he can get first pick—a hot-off-the-presses copy of *Daredevil*.

True story. And that kid? He grew up to be Mark Steven Johnson, the now-38-year-old writer/director. Johnson has leveraged the success he's enjoyed writing two "Grumpy Old Men" scripts and writing and directing "Simon Birch" into paying back the kid inside him, in the form of a dream—a long-awaited "Daredevil" movie.

Johnson will bring Matt Murdock, Marvel Comics' famed blind lawyer-by-day and superhero-by-night, to the screen on Feb. 14. Leading man Ben Affleck plays the Man Without Fear in the 20th Century Fox and Marvel Films release, just the way Johnson wanted it.

See, Johnson is *still* that kid in many ways. The names of past *Daredevil* artists and famous storylines flow freely and easily from his lips. Johnson has packed his script with Daredevil standbys—the psychotic villain Bullseye, love interest-turned-assassin Elektra, and the Kingpin of Crime. He's also spiced up the DD mythos with a few specialties of his own—Johnson's a competitive kickboxer and a motorcycle enthusiast, so expect top-flight fights and bikes aplenty.

As Johnson settles into his modest Los Angeles office for this interview, sipping hot tea from a plain paper cup, he glances at his watch. It's 8 a.m., but Johnson still has film editing to do, and [illegible] disrupt his momentum once he [illegible] the day going.

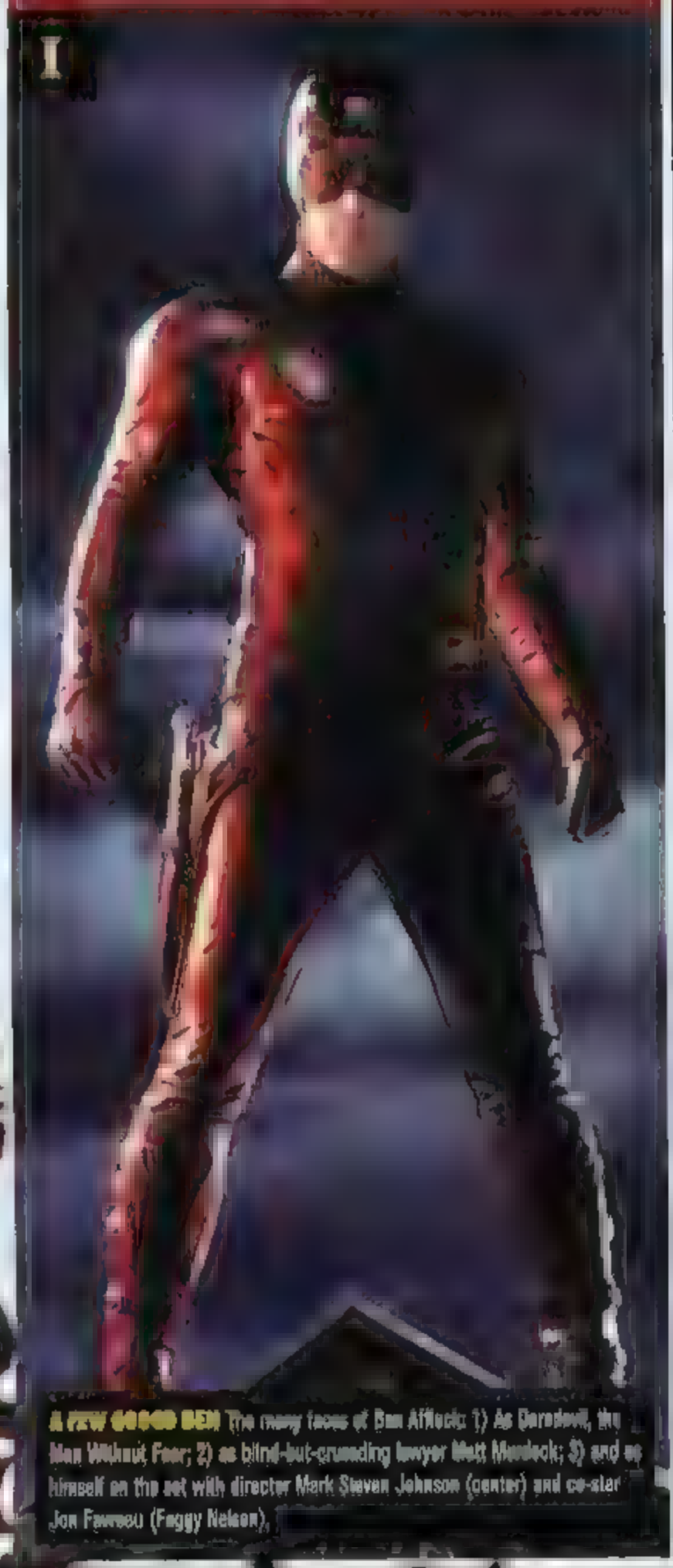
I guess you can't take the kid out of the [illegible] store, but that spinner rack [illegible] in your gut for life.

DEVIL WORSHIP Director Mark Steven Johnson assembled a potent cast to bring his dream project to life, including (L-R): Ben Affleck, Jennifer Garner, Michael Clarke Duncan and Colin Farrell.

MARK

You see a guy covered in scars and popping Vicodins to deal with the pain. It's *really* brutal stuff.

"Daredevil" director Mark Steven Johnson on the film's realism



A FEW GOOD BEN The many faces of Ben Affleck: 1) As Daredevil, the Man Without Fear; 2) as blind-but-crusading lawyer Matt Murdock; 3) and as himself on the set with director Mark Steven Johnson (center) and co-star Jon Favreau (Foggy Nelson).

WIZARD: From everything we've seen, "Daredevil" looks very dark visually. Is it a movie that's also dark in tone?

JOHNSON: Yeah, and that's what attracted me—doing something different from other movies in the superhero genre. I really wanted to show what the real world application would be for a superhero. What would be the repercussions? This is a darker movie. It's not primary colors like a "Spider-Man." This is a guy who only comes out at night, and his is a darker world. This is about a split personality, the two lives this guy leads—lawyer by day and judge and jury by night.

So in your real world take, I assume this is a Daredevil who won't find things easy. This guy is going to bleed

That's right. One of my favorite scenes in the movie is when you see Daredevil come home and undress. It's a very simple scene, but rather than "The Triumphant Hero Returning!" that you'd usually see in a movie such as this, you see a guy covered in scars and popping Vicodins to deal with the pain. It's *really* brutal stuff. You get the idea that even though he's still a young guy, Matt Murdock can't keep doing this all his life and he's beginning to lose his way. When our movie begins, he's beginning to lose his faith in religion, the justice system and himself. That's where he starts, and the story is then about how he tries to find his way back.

So what makes Ben Affleck the guy to pull off this role?

Number one, he's a fan. And you can't ask for more than that. Ben *really* cares about this material. It would be easy for him to look down at this and go, "Ah, it's a superhero movie. I can just walk through it." And you can *tell* when you see some other superhero movies that the stars are just winking at the audience like, "Isn't this funny? Bam! Pow! Zonk!" When somebody does that, it's over right away. If they don't take it seriously, it's not going to work. And Ben takes this very seriously.

Also, he's so physically imposing. Think about it—Ben is three inches taller than Schwarzenegger! He's a huge guy! When you think what a guy would *really* have to look like to go out at night and get into fights, he'd have to be a big, strong guy just to withstand the punishment. Daredevil doesn't have Spider-sense, healing factors or anything like that. So when you look at Ben, you believe, "Yeah, this guy *could* be a vigilante. He can take care of himself in a fight."

So going in, you knew Affleck was a fan, and you knew he was a big, imposing guy. What did you learn about him during shooting?

That he has a level of commitment that I haven't seen before. He *really* impressed me. He trained his ass off, through blindness training, martial arts training, weight and diet training...he was so committed. You don't get that from a lot of actors. And Ben is a great actor besides. He carries off Matt Murdock in a way that'll break your heart.

So who's got the better superhero chin: Affleck as Daredevil or George Clooney as Batman?

[*Laughs*] Affleck. Definitely. Affleck could kick George Clooney's ass!

So what made Jennifer Garner your choice for Elektra?

Jennifer had the right combination of beauty, acting chops and physicality. I didn't anticipate her doing all the stuff that she did in the movie. She really did almost everything herself, which is an incredible bonus to get a star who totally inhabits the character and does all her stunts like that. And she was *great* with those sais [Elektra's weapon of choice]. There was nobody—none of the

doubles, none of the "experts"—who could handle the sais better than her

Bullseye looks a little different than we're used to. What's with that funky symbol on his forehead?

We thought it would be cool to have a Bullseye who's so good, so untouchable and such a badass that he actually puts a target on his head—and he doesn't care. He's saying to people, "You want me? Here, let me make it easy for you. Right here, buddy [*taps forehead*] Right here." And there's *still* no way they're going to have a chance against him.

He did it to himself literally, out of sheer boredom, he gouged this Bullseye design into his own forehead. It's scarification, it's what you see a lot of people doing now, as the next step up from tattooing.

You're a big comic fan, and we know there are characters named Joe Quesada, Jack Kirby and John Romita in the movie. Any other similar geeky references to expect?

There's a priest named Father Everett, named for Bill Everett, one of the creators of Daredevil. Very appropriate to make him "Father."

There is a boxing match with Gene "The Machine" Colan, and there's also a locker room scene where the Fixer is talking to Jack Murdock about the fights he's been in. He runs down a lot of names. "[*Daredevil* writers past and present like Frank] Miller, [David] Mack, [Brian Michael] Bendis—They're all my fighters, just like you," he says.

What's your favorite comic book movie?

I would say "The Crow" is the best one I've seen. It was really honorable to the subject matter, and very tragic and beautiful and violent all at the same time. It delivered in every way that I thought it should. I'm a big [*Crow* creator] James O'Barr fan. There's a flaming double-D symbol you'll see in the movie that's a tribute to the flaming Crow from that film.

How will "Daredevil" stack up against "The Crow"?

Oh man. [*Nervous laughter*] Oh man. I hope "Daredevil" stacks up. You know...[*pauses*] I think as long as you stick with the soul of the character and stay true to it, you can't go wrong. Even if no one else likes it, I can watch and say, "This is the movie I was *supposed* to make, and I made it." That's all I want to do.

VITAL STATS

NAME: Mark Steven Johnson

OCCUPATION: Movie writer/director

BORN: October 28, 1964 in Hastings, Minn.

BASE OF OPERATIONS: Los Angeles

FILM CREDITS: Writer of "Grumpy Old Men" (1993) and "Grumpier Old Men" (1995); writer and director of "Simon Birch" (1998); writer and director of "Daredevil" (2003)

ARCH-NEMESIS WILLAIN: "Stan Lee. Happens every time: he comes to me and says, 'With my new and more powerful skills, you don't have a chance, Daredevil!' And Daredevil has pulled him over again. Face." MSM

"Daredevil" is the kickoff for the 2003 Marvel movie fest. You lead, followed by "X-Men 2," and "Hulk." Is there pressure in that? Would you rather be elsewhere?

No, I *love* going first. Being the first comic book movie out after "Spider-Man" is a good place for us. You know "X-Men 2" is going to be enormous, and you know "Hulk" is going to be enor-

mous. "Daredevil" is more of a question mark. I like going in under the radar. Expectations aren't there like they are for a Hulk or X-Men film. I'd rather surprise everybody. I want America to be going "Who the hell is Daredevil, and why is everybody talking about this movie?"

What kind of crap did you personally go through during this movie? You had strep throat, a bad back...

Yeah, it was grueling. I'm trying to think...I don't think any of the other comic book movies have been done by a writer/director. I think they've all been directors—Tim Burton, Sam Raimi, Bryan Singer. It's stressful when you know you can change it yourself as writer/director. It *haunts* you. I wouldn't go home because I was so obsessed with this movie. At four in the morning, I would wake up in my trailer and do rewrites. I'd say, "I can *make* that scene better. I *know* I have a better line for that." It's a bit daunting, because you never stop working, and my health suffered just a little bit.

What were you like as a kid? Were you a comic geek kid, or the ass-kicking kickboxer?

[*Laughs*] I was a comic kid. Not until I got into college did I really get into kickboxing and stuff. I was the kid who would wait for the drugstore to open up and sit there while they opened the bundles. I'd get my comics, read them, and then I would sell them to my neighbor to get money to buy more comics.

What stuff were you reading as a kid?

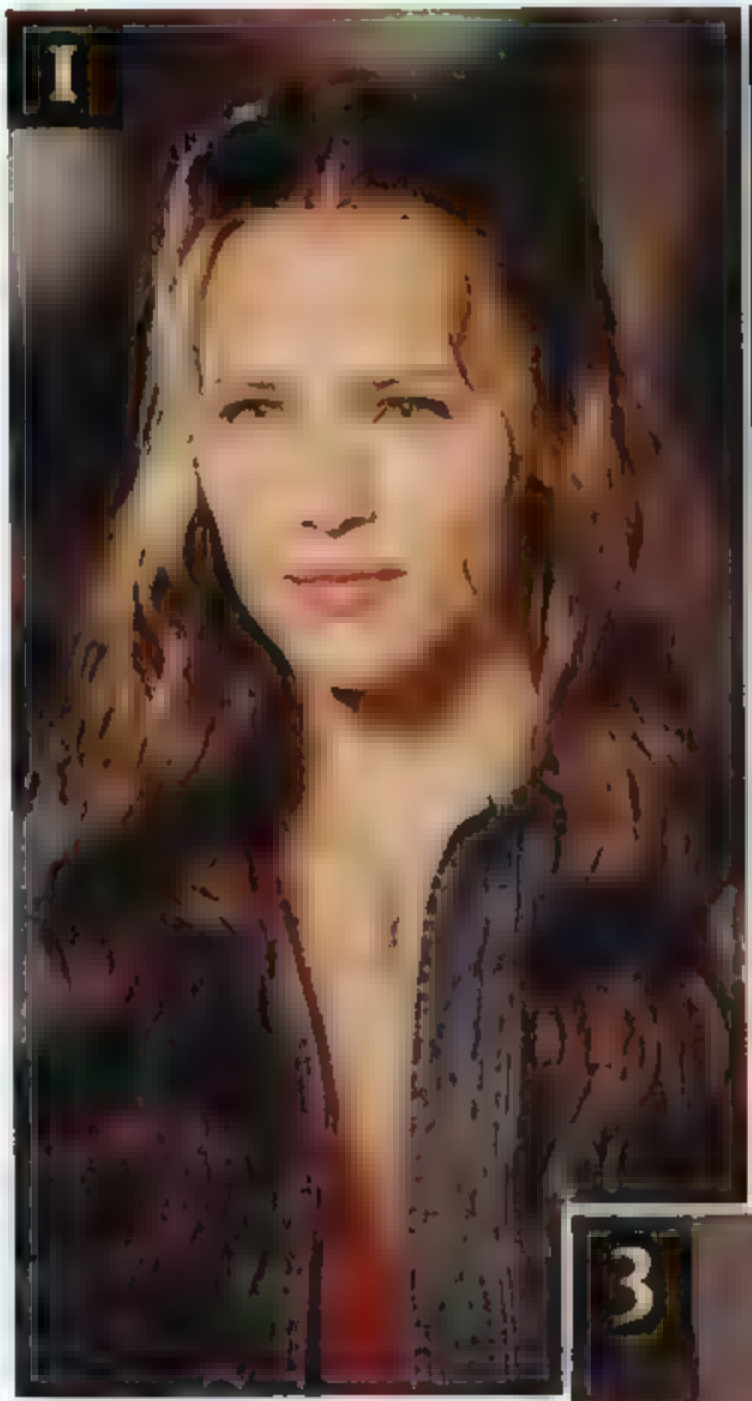
Daredevil, naturally. *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Thor*, *Hulk*, *Avengers*...never read anything but Marvel.

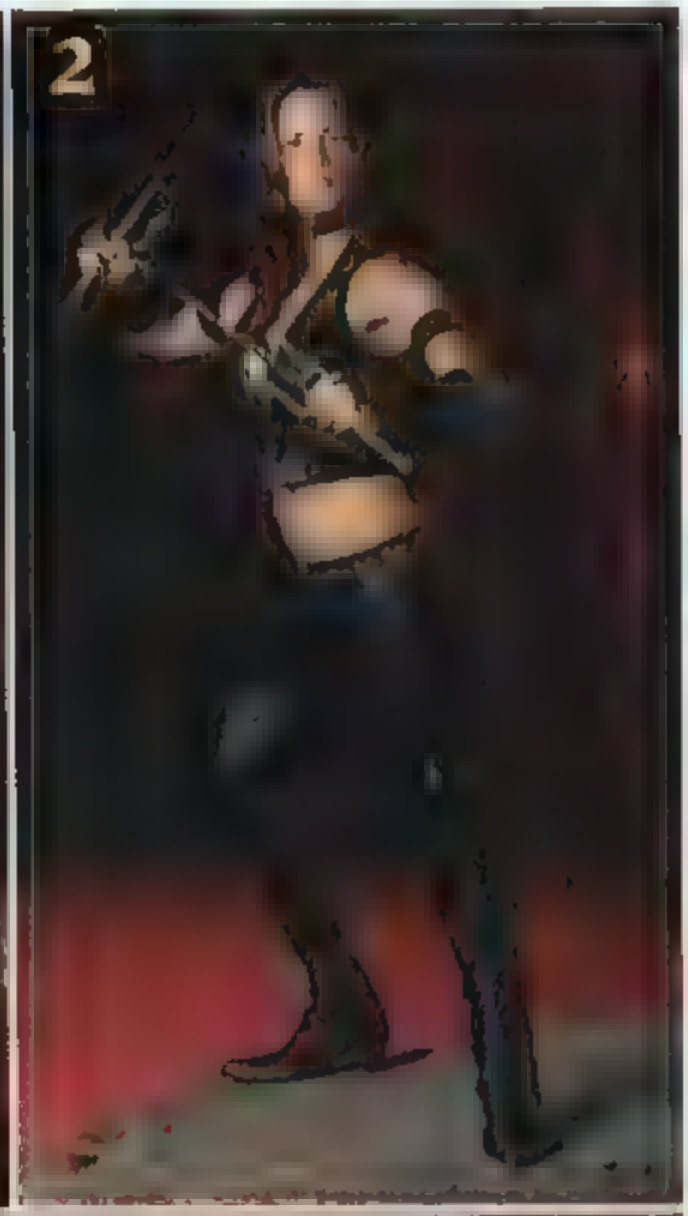
What is your all-time favorite Daredevil story? Do you have one?

"Death of Elektra" [from *Daredevil* (vol. 1) #181] for sure. That's the one that always comes to mind first. It's just heartbreaking. It's the first time I remember reading something where ...I saw that Bullseye stabbing scene and I went, "No!" Of course, it was like, "Come on, that can't be!" It shook me, it really shook me. I really thought it was brilliant writing. It was the first time that I really saw tragedy in a comic book form.

What are you digging on right now in comics?

I've gotten totally hooked on *Ultimate Spider-Man* and *Incredible Hulk*. I'm also reading *The Ultimates*, *Alias*, *Daredevil*, *Elektra*, *Punisher*, *Rising Stars*, *Captain America*. Those are the core books.





GARNERING PRAISE Jennifer Garner was born to play the assassin called Elektra thanks to her beauty (1), her expertise with the sais (2) and her ability to take direction from helmer Mark Steven Johnson (3).

With so many movie-type guys—Kevin Smith, J. Michael Straczynski and the like—writing comics, is there any desire on your part to do the same? A *Daredevil* movie adaptation maybe?

Marvel asked me to do it, and I would have loved to. But my life's still too busy. My dream is, when I have some breathing space after Feb. 14, to get Joe Quesada's lazy ass back behind a drawing table for a story. I think Quesada's a genius. I just love his work. It would take someone like him for me to write comics, 'cause I'm such a geek as far as graphics and the look go. It would all depend on the artist.

What other comic movie would you like to do? Is there another itch you'd like to scratch outside of Daredevil?

DD: THE SEQUEL!

When you're talking big-budget superhero movies, one word usually creeps its way into the conversation: "Franchise."

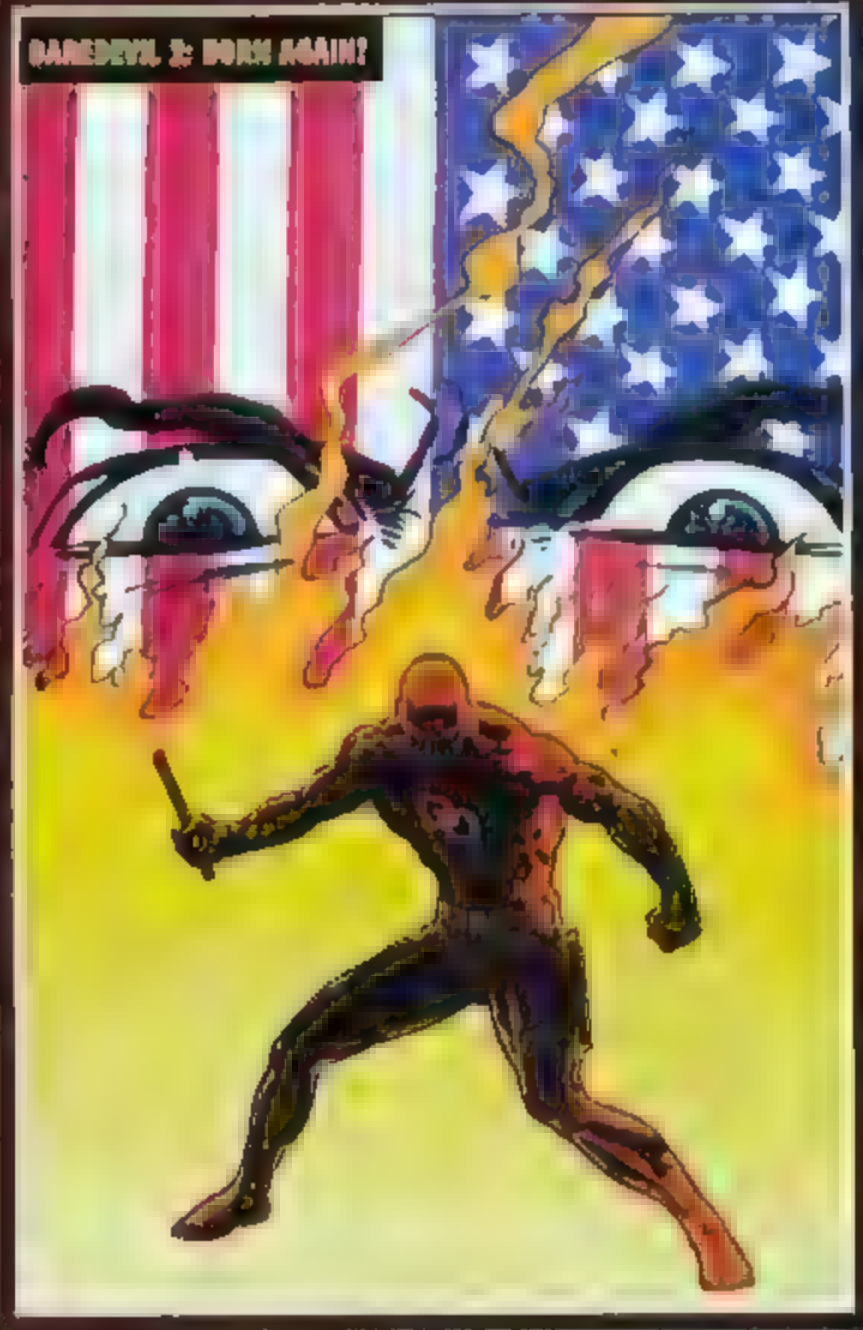
No Hollywood studio wants to develop a multi-million dollar superhero pic if they can't do at least one sequel. "X-Men 2" is already in the works, "Amazing Spider-Man" gets underway this spring, so what's the deal with a possible "Daredevil" sequel?

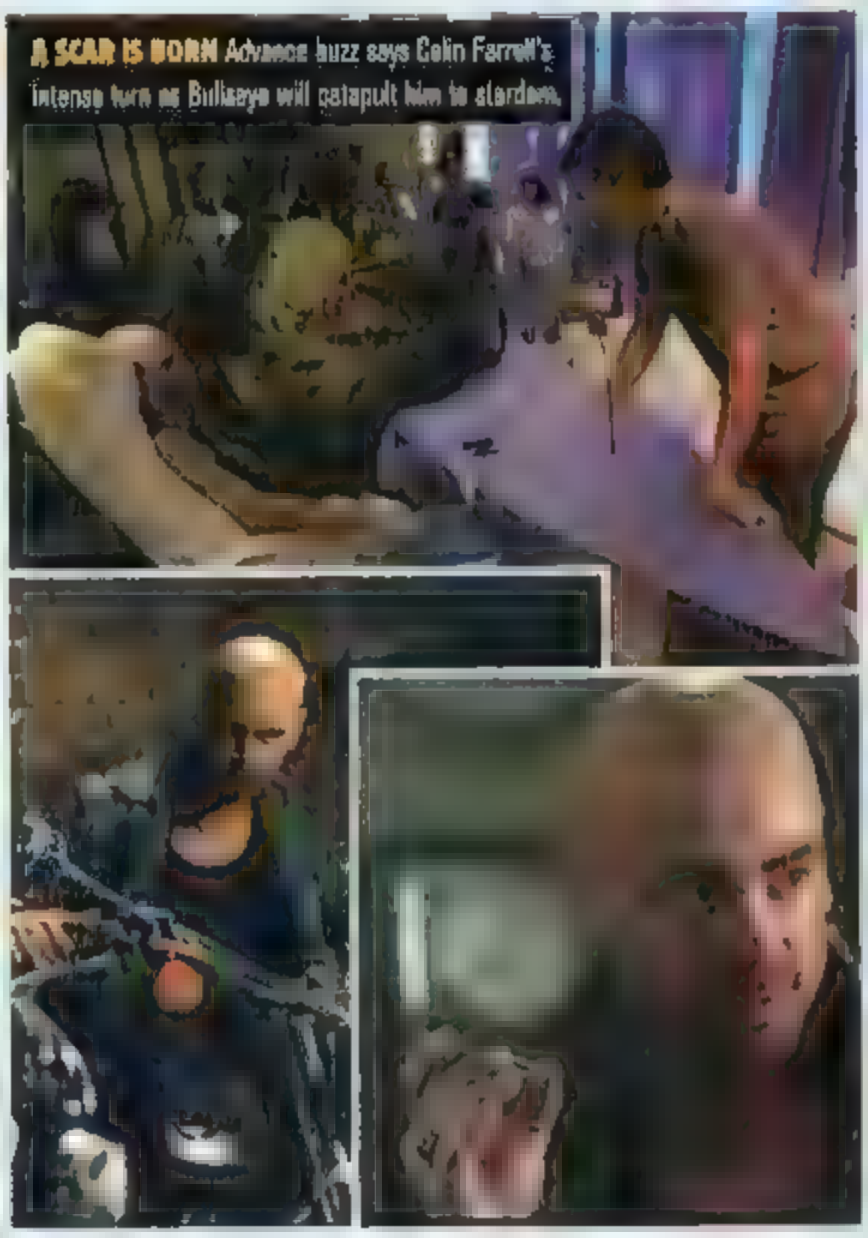
20th Century Fox, the studio behind "Daredevil," will certainly wait until the box office receipts come in before greenlighting a follow-up, but of course, there's already been discussions about it. Here's what "Daredevil" director Mark Steven Johnson had to say about it:

"I've been thinking about that. Because the studio has been asking me about it, too," says Johnson, after pondering the prospect and unleashing a pent-up breath. "Part of me would want to do [famous *Daredevil* storyline] 'Born Again,' where the Kingpin comes back and gets his revenge and just takes Matt Murdock's life apart. But I don't think that would be enough, quite frankly. After Bullseye and Elektra and the Kingpin, you'd have to introduce who's next, who's the new person in the story."

As to what villains he might like to introduce, Johnson plumbed the depths of old Marvel continuity for his first and foremost choice.

"I think there is a version of a Mr. Fear that could be really cool for film, that could be really spooky and scary," ponders the helmer. "The idea of the Man Without Fear who meets a man who can release fear inside you—that's a great idea." **WIZ**





[*Enthusiastically*] Ghost Rider! I believe in that character. I understand the idea of vengeance. I think the concept is all the crime on the news at night. He sees these terrible things that we see children being abducted, people being murdered. We *all* want to do something, we all wish that we could take things into our own hands—and he *does*. I think there is something in that that is really interesting.

Plus, I'm a *huge* motorcycle geek, and I just think Ghost Rider is one of the greatest, most iconic characters in the whole Marvel Universe. He's a flaming skull! That's the *coolest* thing.

Anything else besides Ghost Rider?

Captain America. I believe in Captain America. I think he's one of the greats. To me, he is the last of the great A-list Marvel superheroes that hasn't been done. And especially now, in this day and age, I think it's time to make a story about the ultimate example of patriotism.

But having done "Daredevil," having slept in your trailer and gone through whatever agonies, could you do another superhero movie?

Absolutely! Oh yeah, oh yeah. I *want* to. These are the kind of movies I love and that I want to make. They are exhausting and they take everything you've got out of you, but I love them. I mean, when I was a kid growing up, I was a ways asking, "Why aren't they making these movies? Where's Spider-Man? Where's Hulk? These movies would be *huge*!"

It was just a fantasy as a kid, but now it's reality. I wanted to do the "Daredevil" movie my whole life. I went after it, and devoted years of my life to getting it done because as a fan, *I wanted to see it!* I want to see these get done, and if it takes me doing another myself, I'll definitely do it.

Wizard's tantalizing chat on his Marvel wish list [illegible] he'd be most likely to take it himself. [illegible]

'80s Extreme!

Many will play, but none shall pass the ultimate '80s trivia challenge!

By James McDonough and the WIZARD Staff

To quote Carol Anne Freeling from the horror classic "Poltergeist II," "They're ba-ack..."

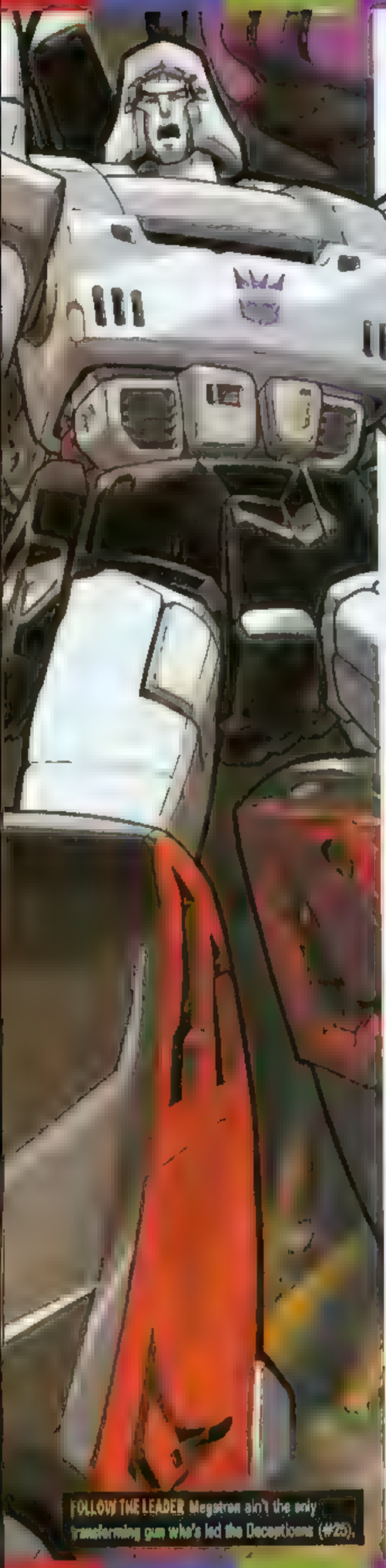
Long before there was such a thing as Pokemon, Yu-Gi-Oh or Power Rangers, the 1980s provided us with transforming robots that waged war over the fate of Earth, real American heroes thwarting the nefarious schemes of a ruthless terrorist organization determined to rule the world, and four mutated turtles defending the Big Apple from murderous ninja clans and alien invaders. Oh yeah, did we forget to mention Michael Jackson's hair caught fire?

And just like the Mohawk, Kylie Minogue and that kitty-devouring alien scamp Alf, many of the Reagan Era's gnarliest franchises have returned. Shaking off the rust and blowing off the dust, Transformers, G.I. Joe, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and even Thundercats are back, kicking butt and taking names across TV, shopping malls and most importantly, the comic book sales charts.

But if you think you know where the beef is when it comes to your favorite retro properties, think again! We've dug up some of the toughest, oddest and silliest questions about these old-school icons to construct the most radical '80s quiz ever. We even put the creators of your favorite retro books to the test to see how extensive their '80s-property knowledge really is.

So, if a childhood full of squandered Saturday mornings parked in front of the boob tube sucking down you weight in Mr. T cereal qualifies you as an expert, then Cum on and Feel the Noize with *Wizard*'s Ultimate '80s Quiz. But be forewarned: We have no pity for the fools who can't pass this test.

Transformers



FOLLOW THE LEADER Megatron ain't the only transforming gun who's led the Decepticons (#25).

ilar speech impediment to "He-Man and The Masters of the Universe" villain Mer-Man

10 Do the time warp again and give us the name of the first ever Transformers toy mail-in offer

11 What major Marvel icon guest-starred in issue #3 of the origina *Transformers* series?

1 Talk about some skeletons in the closet. In the episode "Fire in the Sky" (#7), which Decepticon was revealed to not only have formerly been a Cybertronian scientist, but a pal of the Autobot Skyfire, a.k.a. Jetfire?

12 Oh, it's true, size does matter. So tell us, what is the largest Transformer toy ever re eased?

13 B-b-b-banned in the U.S.A. As of April 30, 2002, which Decepticon has been permanently banned from all major U.S. airlines?

2 In the G1 cartoon, who was the female ninja robot who Megatron considered giving Starscream's rank in the Decepticon hierarchy?

14 Talk about your hot 'bots! Name at least two female Autobots from the G1 cartoon

3 Okay, so the comics had Buster and the cartoon focused on Spike, right? But accord ng to the comics, and aside from having ridiculous first names, how were the Autobots' two bestest human buddies related?

15 Since the Jetfire toy looks so cool, how come Hasbro had Sunbow/Marvel come up with a different version for the comic and cartoon?

4 According to cartoon continuity, which "five faces of death" were responsible for the creation of the Transformers?

16 We all know him as the ultimate Autobot. But back in the day, a young Megatron-worshipping Optimus Prime was known as

5 Who's your daddy? In the Marvel *Transformers* comic, what godlike figure is revered as the father of all Transformers and creator of the Matrix?

17 As seen in Marvel's *Transformers* #4, what classic Marvel locale did the Ark's computer use as reference for Grimlock and the other Dinobots' transformation modes?

6 Ready, get set, start your engines. What was the first motorized Transformer toy?

18 Speaking of Dinobots, can someone explain what the deal is with those tiny little seats that came with them and the original Insecticons?

7 Which loveable Autobot was unlucky enough to be blown to smithereens by fellow 80s icons G.I. Joe?

19 Go-go-gadget screw-up! Which fan-favorite Decepticon was revealed to share a voice with "Inspector Gadget" nemesis Dr. Klaw when the voice actor inexplicably recited a "Transformers" line in Klaw's voice?

8 In the episode "Traitor" (#21), which Autobot, who would rather hunt Turbofoxes than kick Decepticon tail, was accused of betraying his fellow robots in disguise?

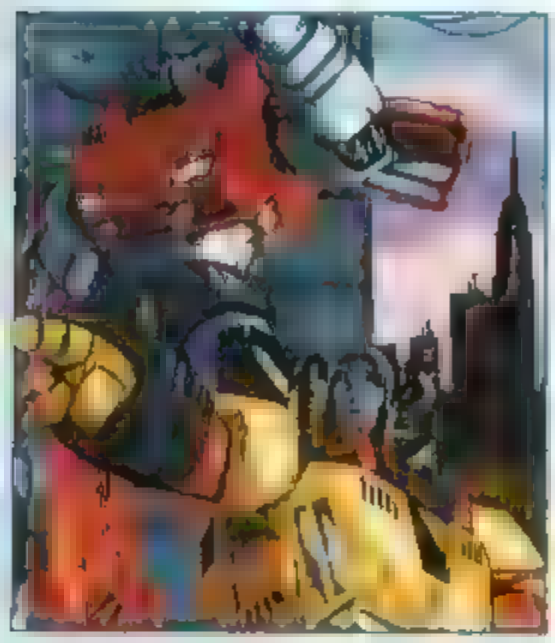
9 Gurgle... gurgle...gurgle... Name the Autobot on the cartoon who shared a sim-

20 What the dilly, yo? Give us the 411 on the difference between the toy and cartoon versions of Decepticon mini-cassettes Rumble and Frenzy

21 Yo Joe! Which member of the G1 Joe team had a daughter who made a brief appearance in "Transformers" Episode #71, "The K[illegible]ing Jar"?

22 How many issues of the original Marvel *Transformers* series came out in the U.S.?

23 And for all you bloody Anglophiles, how many came out across the pond in Jolly Old England's series?



24 Hyaaah! As revealed in the toy's dossier (and not to mention nearly every time he engaged an enemy during the comics), which Decepticon is a master of the ancient Cybertronian martial art of Metallikato?

25 Name at least five Transformers from the comic and cartoon who have risen through the ranks to become commander-in-chief of the Decepticons

26 What's the name of the spy Autobot who can not only transform into a car, but into a "Decepticon" named Counterpunch?

27 In the G1 cartoon, which Autobot developed a crush on a human female and was revealed to have an actual beating heart?

28 Which Academy Award-winning actor actually sang the "Transformers" theme song during an appearance on "The Tonight Show"?

29 Keep it real and name at least three rap superstars who've made reference to the Transformers in their songs.

30 Speaking of keeping it real, what's the bizarre connection between "Marky" Mark Wahlberg and "Transformers The Movie"?

31 Who is considered the rarest Autobot G1 toy car?

32 While we're beating the TF flick to death, can you name one thing that the movie has in common with Star Trek?

33 If Clinton-era intern Monica Lewinsky was a Transformer, what line would she have most likely appeared in?

34 What major artist knocked Tranfans socks off with his uncanny rendition of Galvatron for the cover of *Transformers* #67?

35 In the Marvel U.S. comics, when Ratchet tackled Megatron through a trans-dimensional portal, what was the shocking end result of his sacrifice?

36 So, you think you're hardcore, huh? Then name all six of the toy Sixshot's transformation modes

37 What's the name of the little R2-D2 wannabe who "rolls" with Optimus Prime?

38 Can you dig it, sucka! Brock Lesner isn't the only wrestler with a robotic personality. Which Autobot Micromaster enjoyed a brief career as a professional wrassler?

39 According to cartoon lore, what is Vector Sigma?

40 In the 98th and final episode of the original U.S. Transformers animated series ("Rebirth Part 3"), Spike and Fortress Maximus defeat the mighty Headmaster Scorponok and the rest of the Decepticons. What event, prophesized by that know-it-all Vector Sigma, happens next?

ANSWERS Starscream 2. The lovely and talented Weirdbird (Episode #26 "Enter the Nightbird") 3. Buster was Spike's younger brother 4. The Quintessons 5. Primus 6. [illegible] 7. Scrublubber who unwittingly bit the bullet in the pages of *G1 Joe and the Transformers* #1 8. Munge 9. Scrapper 10. [illegible] 11. The Amazing Spider-Man 12. The extremely hard-to-find Fortress Maximus 13. The malevolent Megatron, who transforms into a pistol 14. Action Ents One-Beta, Vector Sigma, Wreckercracker 15. The toy is actually a Bandai mold based on the Macross/Robotech Valkyrie design. That being the case, Hasbro didn't believe it was a wise decision to [illegible] in the cartoon or comics 16. Orion Pax (issue #59, "New Dawn") 17. The Savage Land 18. Both the Dinobots and Insecticons were taken from Takara's Diaclone line. [illegible] robot planet, pilotable mecha. 19. Soundwave (Episode #5, "Roll for It") 20. The toy Rumble is red, while the toy Frenzy is blue. The toon Rumble is blue, while the toon [illegible] is red. 21. Alexis, and the little lady's name was Montana Prescott 22. 80 (not too shabby for a "four issue limited series") 23. 332 (Lovely) 24. The Pretender Bludgeon 25. Buzzsaw, Galvatron, Megatron, Rattrap, Scorponok, Shockwave, Starscream and Thundercracker 26. Punch 27. Powerglide (Episode 54, "The Girl Who Loved Powerglide") 28. Tom [illegible] MAX, Dr. Dre, Run Warren G and Will Smith 30. At the end of the film "Boogie Nights," Wahlberg's character performs "The Touch," the incredibly cheesy Transformers [illegible] song. 31. Skids, a blue Hanwan who appeared in the G1 second wave in 1985 and was packed one per two cases. 32. Leonard Nimoy provided the voice for Decepticon [illegible] Galvatron 33. The Headmasters 34. Jim Lee 35. The two were fused into a horribly scarred amalgamation that shared a painful psychic link (issues #50, "Skin Deep," and #52, "The Price of Life"). 36. Winged Wolf, Tank, Laser Pistol, Star Fighter, Armored Carrier and Robot 37. Roller 38. Roadbuster in *Transformers* #55, "The Intergalactic Autobot Championship" 39. The supercomputer responsible for giving life to all Transformers 40. Cybertron reenters its Golden Age

GENERATION TESTY

WIZARD quizzes your favorite '80s comic creators

PAT LEE

Penciler on Dreamwave Productions' *Transformers: Generation 1* mini-series

TOTAL SCORE: 20 out of 40

G1 penciler Pat Lee's longtime love of Transformer toys and amazing ability to draw realistic mech combined to make the *Transformers: G1* mini-series a competition-trouncing success. But when it comes to Lee's overall G1 knowledge...let's just say he's no Perceptor.

Answer to Question #5: "Can I ask someone here? [Shouts in the background] Hey, someone help me! Huh? Where did everyone go? I don't know...Arcee?"

Question #21: "Ah, f—, I don't know...Zartan?"

Question #30: "I don't even know who he is."

Because he failed our little quiz, Pat has been forced to pencil a 64-page Wheelie one-shot.

SIMON FURMAN

Writer on Dreamwave Productions' *Transformers: The War Within*

TOTAL SCORE: 22 out 40

Furman is best known for such TF tales as "Matrix Quest" and the U.K. classic, *Target 2006*. He's currently attracting a new generation of fans with Dreamwave's *G1* prequel *The War Within*. "I merited a 'must try harder' on this," Furman admits. "When it comes to the TV show and the toys, I'm distinctly rusty. Not that I only follow one continuity, perish the thought, but I'm in need of some serious cramming on my Orion Paxes and Nightbirds."

Essentials

WIZARD spotlights the raddest retro-inspired products

G.I. JOE

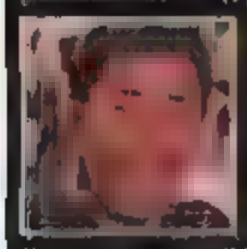
2002 Snake Eyes Action Figure

(Hasbro, $8)

Bad-ass. That was the only word that came to mind when we saw this ass-kicking reaction of the Joe team's lethal weapon. A cross between the classic second Snake Eyes action figure and the "tiger stuff" mentality of today, these three inches-plus of plastic faithfully capture what makes Snake Eyes cool: the intense demeanor, the muscular frame and that huge honkin' sword. Plus, he arrives as a two-pack with his very own mocking bad. Cobra Commander!

CREATION TESTS

WIZARD quizzes your favorite '80s comic creators



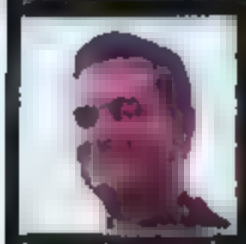
LARRY HAMA

Current writer on Image/Devil's Due's *G.I. Joe: Front Line*, creator of G.I. Joe continuity

TOTAL SCORE: 9 out of 15

Hama was responsible for the original Marvel *G.I. Joe* series' 155-issue run, as well as most of the dossiers that came with the original Hasbro action figures. Presently, he's working on the first four-issue storyarc for Devil's Due second Joe series, *Front Line*.

"The ones that stumped me were [the movie-related questions], mainly because I never saw the movie," laughs Hama. "On #13, I think I would have got most of them, except for Vlad and Montezuma. What was Mindbender thinking about that day? Impalement and tourists?"



JOSH BLAYLOCK

Writer of Image/Devil's Due's *G.I. Joe*

TOTAL SCORE: 14 out 15

Blaylock marches away with an impressive score, but the origin of Serpentor proves to be elusive for the Joe fanatic. "I think Serpentor was Hama's way of sneaking some education into *G.I. Joe*," says the scribe, in reference to the tricky Question #13. "There was a short story in one of the old comics where Serpentor remembers back to ancient Rome and tells some Cobras about how when food rations were running low during a war, they used pita bread and vegetables and some sauce or something, making, essentially, the first pizza."

G.I. Joe

1 For G.I. Joe's 30th anniversary in 1994, Hasbro released an exclusive mail-order figure that was touted as the first G.I. Joe. What was that character's name and codename?

2 Rivals Snake Eyes and Stormshadow are revered as silent weapons of death, but what is the clan of ninja responsible for turning them into such badasses?

3 Speaking of those two wacky ninjas, the two served together in Vietnam alongside what other member of G.I. Joe, according to the original Marvel series?

4 What do the initials "B.E.T." stand for as it pertains to "G.I. Joe: The Movie"?

5 Good job, grunt. Now drop and give me the names of two celebrity "athletes" who became members of G.I. Joe through the toyline.

6 Which one of Slaughter's Marauders was actually an ex-Cobra Viper?

7 That slippery serpent Cobra Commander showed up on what other big '80s cartoon trying to hock his synthoid technology?

8 Which team of roughnecks was originally slated to be knock-offs of the Ewoks until Joe writer Larry Hama intervened?

9 While we're on the subject, what G.I. Joe action figure's sculpt was actually based on the superscribe's mug?

10 Everybody knows that lovable curmudgeon Burgess Meredith provided the voice for Golobulus in "G.I. Joe: The Movie," but can you name the other G.I. Joe/Rocky connection?

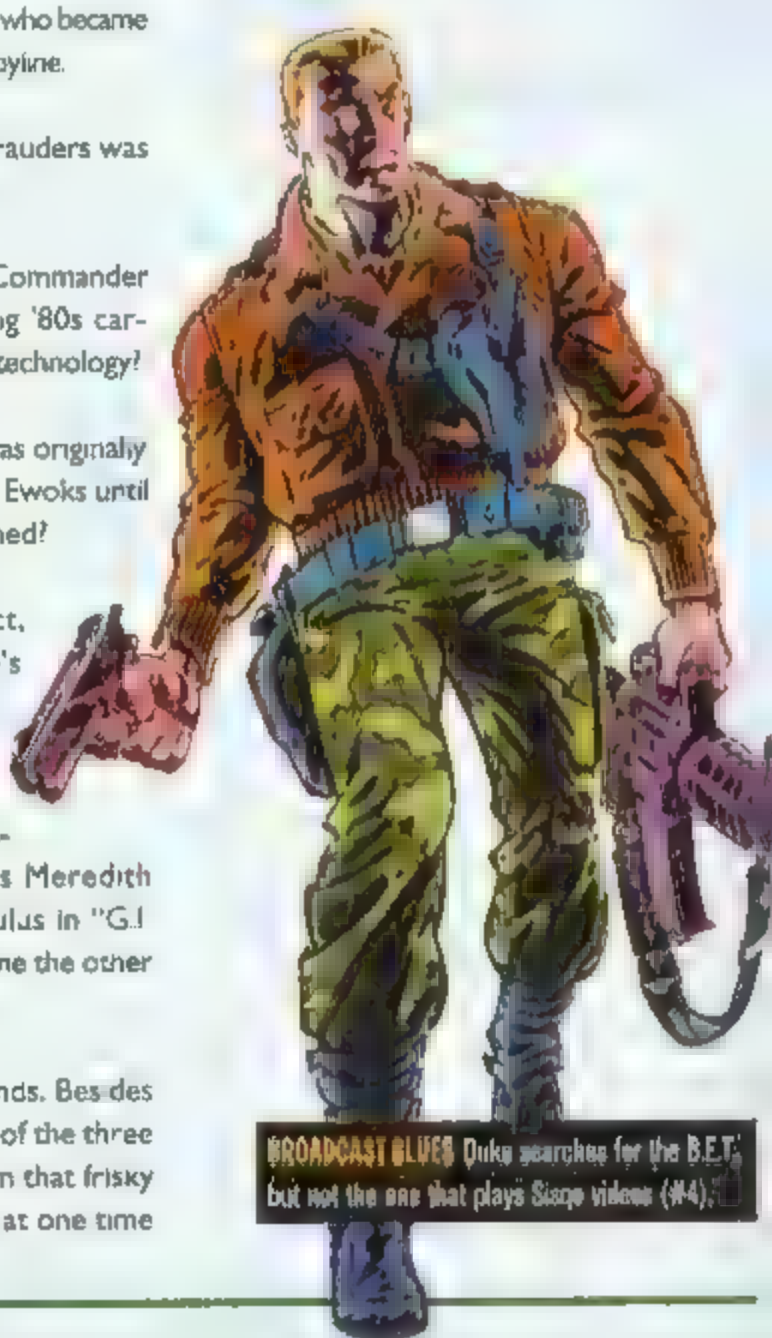
11 Talk about yer sloppy seconds. Besides our man Destro, name two of the three other members of Cobra whom that frisky Baroness has gotten it on with at one time or another in the comics.

12 Round 1—FIGHT! What's the *G.I. Joe/Streetfighter II* connection?

13 Okay kids, time to break out the history books. List five of the historical conquerors whose DNA was exhumed by Cobra scientists in the cartoon in order to create the ultimate Cobra leader, Serpentor.

14 Before he was kicking puppies and terrorizing the Western Hemisphere in the comics and toyline, Cobra Commander spent his early days in the fast-paced, morally rewarding career of...

15 Even the most faithful Joe fan will admit the movie laid its fair share of eggs. Who were the two mortworthy characters introduced in the film who, thankfully, never received action figures?



BROADCAST BLUES Duke searches for the B.E.T., but not the one that plays Slayer videos (#4).

ANSWERS 1. Joseph B. Colton, a.k.a. G.I. Joe 2. The Arashikage 3. Stalker (as revealed in issue #28) 4. Broadcast Energy Transmitter 5. William "The Fridge" Perry as Sgt. Slaughter 6. Mercer 7. Transformers (Episode #68, "Only Human" he was called "Sweeps") 8. The Dreadnoks (Hasbro wanted Hama to somehow incorporate their creations into the Joe mythos; Hasbro refused, saying there was no way to tie an outlaw biker gang with the military. The Dreadnoks were created as a joking response, and stuck.) 9. Tunnel Rat 10. In Marvel's *G.I. Joe: Order of Battle* #2 (a Who's Who-style Joe compendium), Rocky Balboa was actually listed as a member of the Joe team. The following issue officially retracted the entry. 11. Cobra Commander, Major Bludd, Fred VII (a Crimson Guard who impersonated Cobra Commander) 12. In 1993, there was a subline added to the G.I. Joe toys which was based on Capcom's wildly successful fighting game. 13. Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Napoleon, General Armon Toth, Vlad the Impaler, Ivan the Terrible, Montezuma, Sun Tzu 14. Selling used cars 15. Big Lob and Pythona

Thundercats

1 In the episode "Excalibur" (#43), Mumm-Ra got his mitts on King Arthur's sword. What happened when Excalibur clashed with the Sword of Omens?

2 Name two other Rankin/Bass productions that tried to cash in on the "Thundercats" cheesy, animal-themed bandwagon.

3 Great Scott! What element can render even the most powerful Thundercat as weak as a kitten?

4 To erect the mighty Cat's Lair, Panthro received a helping paw from what cutesy, Ewok-inspired Third Earthers?

5 What was the name of the Kraven the Hunter-esque scoundrel who wanted to add the Thundercats to his trophy collection?

6 The Thundercats ride in style. Can you name at least three of their vehicles?

7 Now tell us what the Cats use to fuel those thunderiffic machines

8 Who's the saber-toothed ex-Thundercat that returned from the grave to battle his onetime brother-in-arms Jaga?

9 Lion-O may be the pick of the Thundercats litter, but who's his papa?

10 Speaking of his pappy Lion-O had to free his father from the clutches of what shady villain?

11 What was the name of Mumm-Ra's mummified poochie?

12 The Thundercats had their very own comic series from Marvel's Star line. How many issues did it last?

13 Which Thundercat was inadvertently responsible for the events that lead to the planet Thundera's destruction?

14 Game over, man! What prehistoric gaming console boasts the only Thundercats video game?

15 The Sword of Omens gives Lion-O "sight beyond sight," but what other ability can this supernatural blade grant our hero?

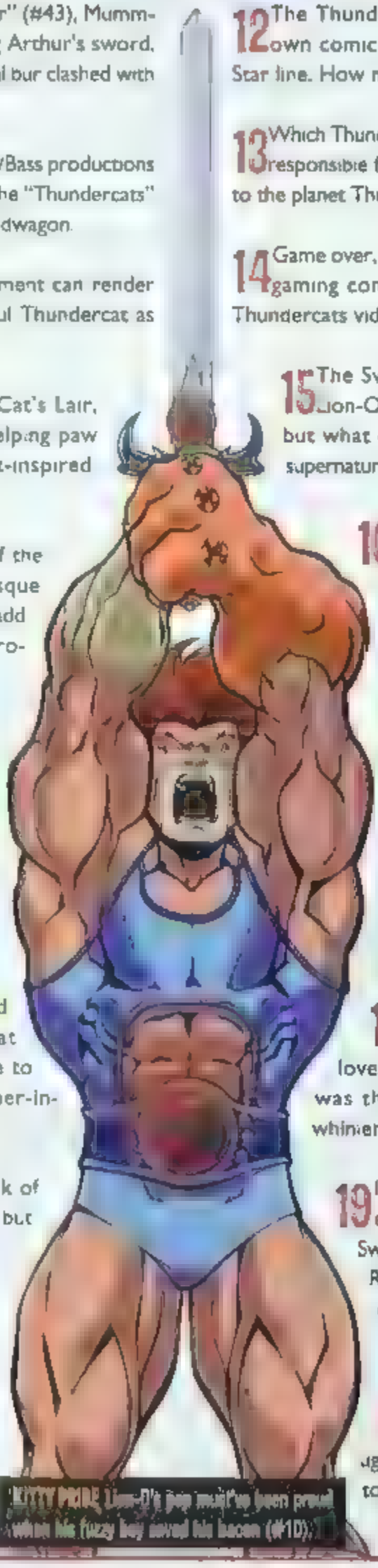
16 Name the four scurvy dogs who make up that ragtag band of pirates known as the Berzerkers.

17 Way back in 1998, what action star was slated to sink his teeth into the role of Panthro in a Thundercats live-action movie, which turned out to be nothing more than an Internet hoax?

18 Lion-O's nursemaid Snarf sure loves to whine, but what was the name of his even whinier nephew?

19 In his ploy to get his ever-living hands on the Sword of Omens, Mumm-Ra once created the guise of a fake Thundercat by the name of .

20 Name all five of those mean and ugly mutants (no, not O-town) who are thorns in the T-Cats' side

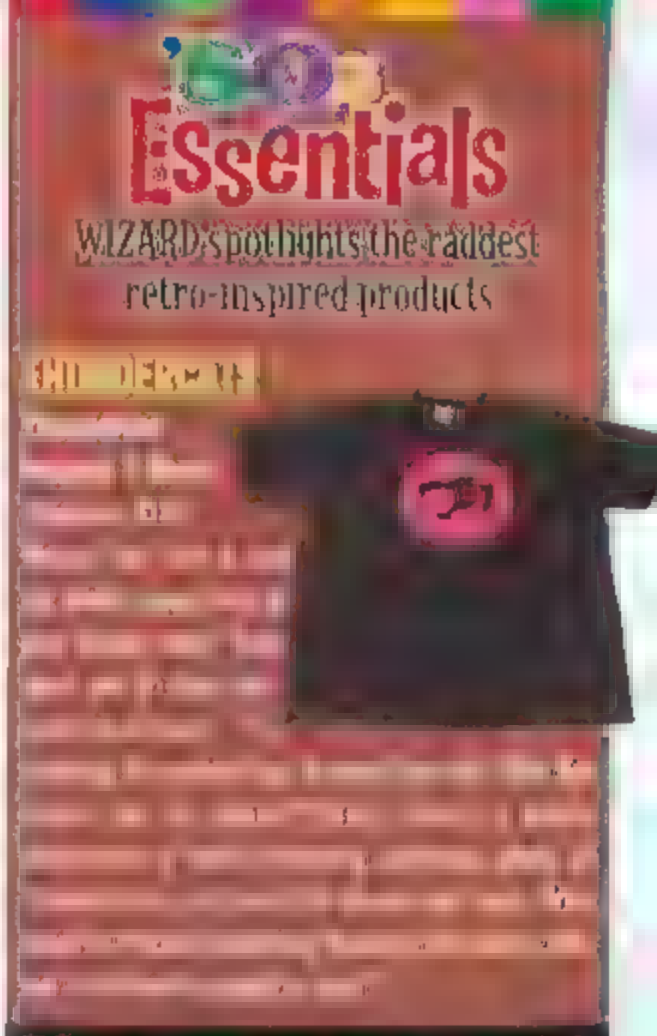


KITTY PRIDE: Lion-O's pop must've been proud when his fuzzy boy saved his bacon (#10).

ANSWERS

Essentials

WIZARD spotlights the raddest retro-inspired products



GENERATION TWENTY

WIZARD quizzes your favorite '80s comic creators

ED McGUINNESS

Penciler on DC/Wildstorm's *Thundercats* mini-series

TOTAL SCORE: 14 out of 20

A longtime fan, one of the superstar artist's dreams came true when Wildstorm head honcho Jim Lee called him out of the blue to see if he was interested in penciling the first five-issue *Thundercats* mini-series. McGuinness did pretty well on our little quiz, but not without his fair share of complaints.

Answer to Question #8: "C'mon, what about those hoverboards?! Give me partial credit at least! There was an episode we've Lion-O strapped one to each foot."

Question #19: "Meowmi-0!"

"I was acing this thing until you broke out with the nerd questions," jeers McGuinness. "[Doing his best Comic Book Guy impersonation] 'In episode 22, how many times did...?' Geez!"

J. SCOTT CAMPBELL

Penciler on DC/Wildstorm's *Thundercats* #0

TOTAL SCORE: 8 out 20

Ever the mega-'80s fan (Campbell drew the dynamic, nostalgia-drenched opening art for this feature), Campbell accepted our quiz challenge with guns ready to blaze, but it looks like Thundercats love just ain't his saucer of milk.

Answer to Question #9: "Lion-E?"

Question #18: "Sniff?"

Question #19: "Mumm-Rear."

Better luck next time, Jeff! (And thanks for being a good sport.)

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

'80s Essentials

WIZARD spotlights the oldest relevant spin-off products

Generation Nasty

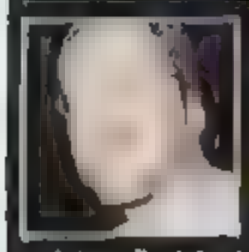
WIZARD quizzes your favorite '80s comic creators

PETER LAIRD

Writer of Mirage's Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (vol. 3), co-creator of TMNT

TOTAL SCORE: 13 out of 15

As the guy who helped invent the rascally reptiles nearly 20 years ago (who's back on board with the latest series from Mirage), Laird knows his Turtles trivia (he only missed questions 10 and 13). However, it's his knowledge of nerve-grating rap music that truly impresses. "Over the course of the three films, such luminaries as MC Hammer, Hi Tek, Riff, Ya Kid K, The Barrio Boyzz and Partners In Kryme have contributed their musical stylings," says the scribe, in reference to Question #4. "Though to be honest, Ya Kid K may have a hot career right now that I know nothing about."



JIM LAWSON

Penciller on Mirage's Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (vol. 3)

TOTAL SCORE: 9 out of 15

Currently, the laid-back artist and mega-Turtlefan is tackling the art chores on the tenacious terrapins' latest Mirage Studios series alongside writer and original Turtles co-creator Peter Laird. Compared to some of our other participants, Lawson fared admirably, but can't escape something we like to call, "The Revenge of the Frog Brother!"

"Whoa! That's weird," says the artist, in reference to Question #5. "We were just talking about him at lunch. I can't believe I've had Corey Feldman brought up to me twice in one day. Man, that's kinda creepy."

1 The name "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" is a parody of what two Marvel comics?

2 What's the name of Stan Sakai's lethal Lepus who appeared in both the TMNT cartoon and toyline?

3 Konami released a multitude of TMNT video games. Can you name for us the three classic TMNT titles to appear on the eight-bit Nintendo Entertainment System?

4 Besides Suge Knight's bee-yotch Vanilla Ice, what other washed-up rapper contributed to the soundtrack of a Ninja Turtles flick?

5 Which former Goonie supplied the voice of Donatello for the first and third TMNT movies?

6 What indy icon guest-starred in the pages of the original Mirage TMNT series when the Turtles were transported to the Middle Ages?

7 Before there was ever an "American Idol," the Turtles (colorful, teenage pop stars in their own right) went on a musical tour for what Pepsi-owned fast food chain?

8 What was the name of the evil Ninja Turtle with an inferiority complex who appeared in both the cartoon and toyline?

9 Which towering pro wrestler donned the cape and claws to play the brief role of Super-Shredder in the second TMNT flick?

10 Besides being about as tall as Will's cousin Carlton, what else do the Turtles have in common with "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air"?

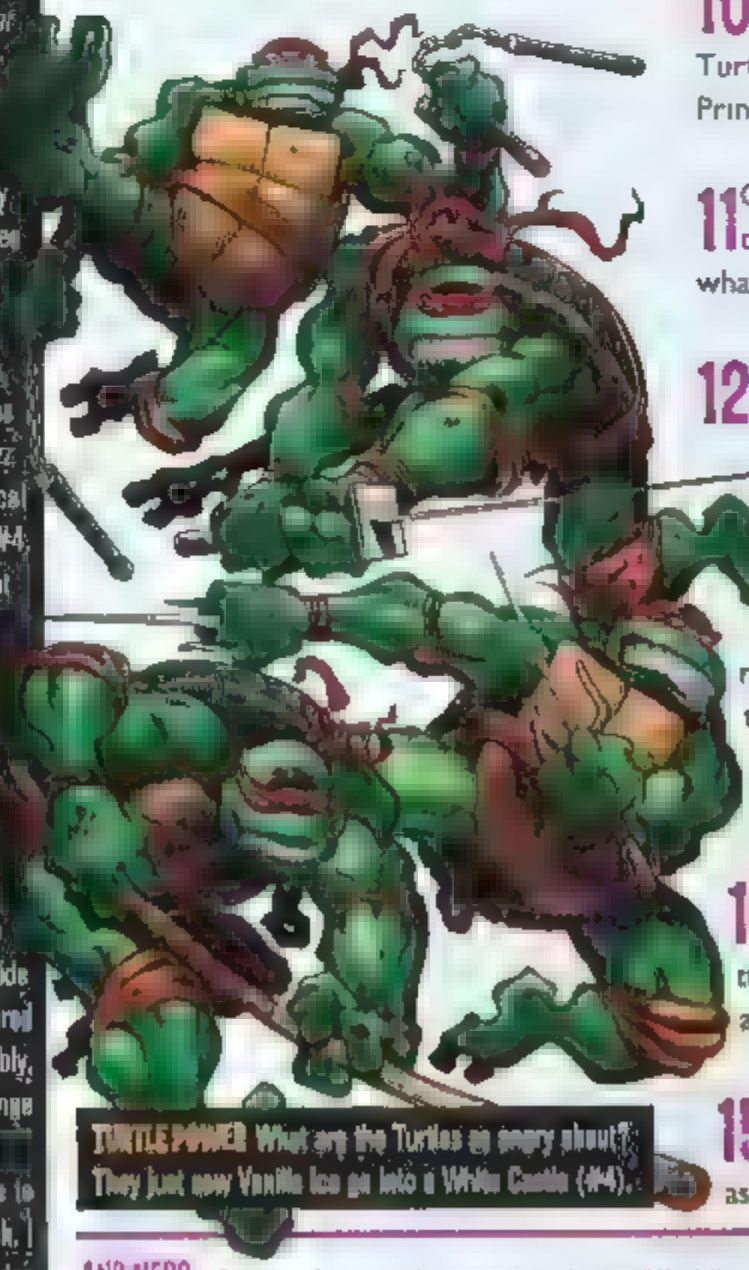
11 On a couple of occasions, our heroes in the half-shell have come to blows with what original Image Comics character?

12 Speaking of crossovers, what TV show featuring other garish martial artists did the live-action TV Turtles make a guest appearance on?

13 April O'Neil is the ravishing, jumpsuit-wearing news reporter for Channel 6 News in the cartoon, but what was less-glamorous career did she hold in the original Mirage series?

14 Speaking of hot chicks (well, sorta), what was the name of the female ninja turtle who popped in the short-lived live-action TMNT series?

15 In the *Raphael* one-shot (Mirage, 1985), what two comic creators made cameos as a pair of goonish purse-snatchers?



TURTLE POWER: What are the Turtles so angry about? They just saw Vanilla Ice go into a White Castle (#4).

ANSWERS: 1. The ninjas of Daredevil and the teenage mutants of uncanny X-Men 2. Usagi Yojimbo, the samurai rabbit 3. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (NES version), Arcade Game and TMNT II: The Manhattan Project 4. The one and only MC Hammer 5. Corey Feldman 6. Cerebus (TMNT vol. 1) #48) 7. Pizza Hut 8. Slash (inside #64 "Slash, the Evil Turtle from Dimension X") 9. Kevin Nash 10. The Fresh Prince's uncle Phil, a.k.a. James Avery, actually provided the voice for the cartoon's Shredder 11. Savage Dragon 12. The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers 13. She was mad scientist Baxter Stockman's assistant 14. Venus De Milo 15. TMNT creators Eastman and Laird

'80s Bonus Round

He-Man

1 Which superstar comics writer actually penned 16 episodes of the original "He-Man and the Masters of the Universe" animated series?

2 Which major comic book publisher printed the original *Masters of the Universe* mini-series?

3 How many He-Man-inspired video games were released in the 1980s?

4 That bonehead Skeletor originally served as the apprentice of what evil Etherian sorcerer?

5 He-Man, the most powerful man in the Universe, went toe to toe with what DC icon in 1982?

6 Holy deleted scenes! What shocking revelation (that didn't make the film's final cut) did Man-At-Arms discover in the comic adaptation of the "Masters of the Universe" movie?

7 Revered as something of a Holy Grail to many a MOTU collector, the foot-tall, Italian exclusive monster called Tytus commands a whopping $600. What are the three words inscribed on the Mexican variant's back that make it the rarest MOTU toy of them all?

8 Towards the end of the 80s, there were plans for a new MOTU line set in Pre-Eternia featuring a protagonist named He-Ro (ughh!). Lack of interest caused the idea to be scrapped, but what was the tentative title of that toyline?

9 Where did the name of She-Ra, He-Man's twin sister, originate from?

10 Shame, shame. What embarrassing skeleton is hidden in both the Punisher and He-Man's closets?

TRAINING DAY Sure, Skeletor's the supreme evil magician in Eternia, but he had to have a master (#4).

Battle of the Planets

1 What does the animated series' G-1 (a.k.a. Mark) have in common with the Transformers' Cliffjumper and Scooby Doo's Shaggy?

2 In Land of the Rising Run, "BotP" is known as "Gatchaman," but what are the G-Force members' Japanese names?

3 Speaking of strange languages, what's up with the way Keyop talks in the American version of "BotP?"

4 Gatchaman is actually an onomatopoeia for what (bonus point if you actually know what onomatopoeia actually is)?

5 What was the original name for Gatchaman before being changed in Japan at the last minute?

OUTCHA, MAUM Due to Keyop's bizarre warblings (#3), Tiny had to stomp on him.

The Future of Retro

What's in store for the next wave of '80s-inspired comics

ROBOTECH (Wildstorm) This December, the classic animated series receives the comic treatment, when the sci-fi takes flight with a special issue #0. Serving as a prelude, the book features a jam story boasting art from a wide array of Wildstorm heavies, including Jim Lee, Ale Garza, Leo Dermejo and others. Two weeks after that (Dec. 18), look for a six-issue mini-series penned by Tommy Yune of *Speed Racer: Born To Race* fame and *Noble Causes*' Jay Faerber with art by Leung Ye (*X-Men: Evolution*). The project is a dream come true for fans of '80s mech who can't wait to revisit as Rick Hunter, Roy Fokker and those ass-kicking Veritech fighter jets.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (Dreamwave) Another TMNT book? Similar to the two-pronged Turtle attack of years past, Dreamwave will begin publishing a second TMNT series based on the new cartoon, which debuts this February. Things kick off (pun #17) this March with a five-issue limited series by Peter David (*Captain Marvel*) and the King of Retro himself, Pat Lee (*Transformers*' #17). Though this title is targeted towards a younger audience, Dreamwave promises a series high on action and low on corny. "What's fun about Turtles is the diversity," explains Lee. "With Transformers, it's a lot of robots and blocky shapes. But with the Turtles, you get to play with all sorts of different stuff. It's a little something different and a great way to kind of freshen things up."

VOLTRON (Image) Having experienced success with its *G.I. Joe* and *Micronauts* series, Image studio Devil's Due continues its retro recipe for success by obtaining what's arguably the last substantial '80s license. While a creative team has yet to be confirmed, the new series will focus on the fan-favorite "Lion" version of the Defender of the Universe, but if you're expecting your father's Voltron, you may be in for a bit of a surprise. The studio plans a complete revamp that will cast a more contemporary look on the franchise while hopefully paving the way for a new animated series.

"We really want to push the envelope and bring a very modern feel to the classic Voltron characters," explains Devil's Due president Josh Blaylock, "but keep the core essence intact. Drama, intrigue, and giant monsters and robots. It's like Transformers and Star Wars rolled into one." Voltron is tentatively scheduled to roar into comic shops in May 2003. ■ JMcD

Micronauts

Where do the Micronauts hail from?

The original Baron Karza toy was based on what mythological beast?

What was the name of the Roboid that accompanied Commander Rann (a.k.a. Space Glider) during his 1,000-year voyage through the Microverse?

How many issues were in the first volume of Marvel's *Micronauts* series?

While negotiating with Takara over the rights to produce Micronauts toys back in 1977, the Mego toy corporation turned down the merchandising rights to what unknown film (a move that ultimately led to their demise)?

Furthering their integration into the Marvel Universe the Micronauts shared a four-issue limited series with what Marvel icons?

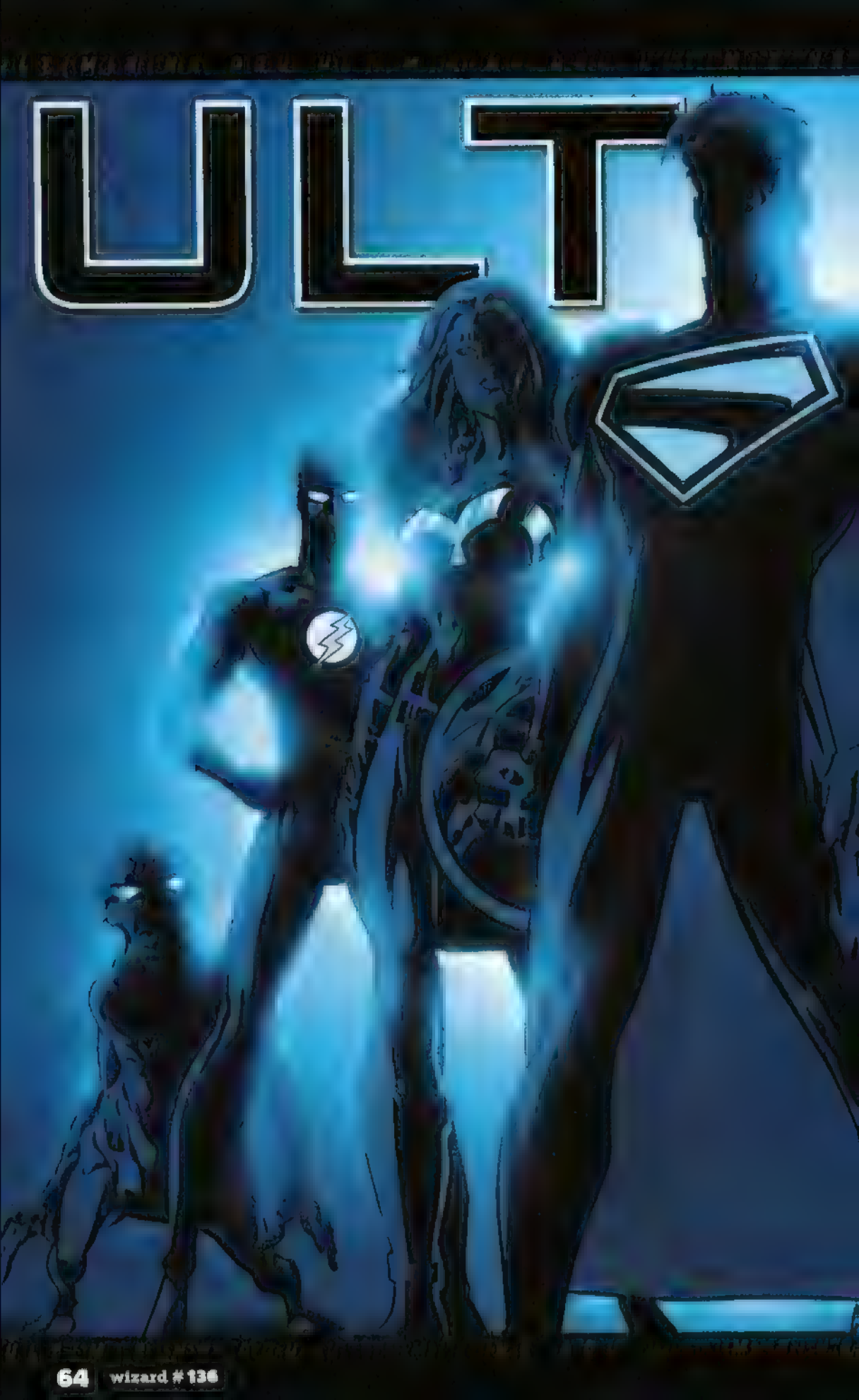
What muck-encrusted Marvel staple did our band of pint-sized revolutionaries bump into in *Micronauts* (vol. 1) #7?

BEASTLY BARON Here's a chance to question #2's heavy-hitting villain before final exam.

ANSWERS 1. J. Michael Straczynski 2. DC 3. There were five *MOTU: The Power of He-man* for the Atari 2600, *MOTU: The Heart of Stone* for the Commodore 64, *MOTU: The Motion Picture* for the Commodore 64 and the Spectrum ZX, *MOTU: Terrataxe* for the Commodore 64 and *MOTU* for the Spectrum ZX. 4. Hordak, as revealed in BBS's "He-Man and She-Ra: The Secret of the Sword" animated theatrical release. 5. Superman, in the pages of *DC Comics Presents* #47. 6. He appeared in American flag and a NASA spacesuit reading "Starfinder 5 July 10, 2221" located deep within Castle Grayskull. 7. "Made in Mexico" 8. "The Power of Grayskull" 9. Ra is the Egyptian sun god, and the show's creators wanted a name that reflected Prince Adam was portrayed by John[illegible] undercover on the [illegible]

10. [illegible] All three were written by Larry Kasanoff. Mark Ken[illegible] insane [illegible] Jun Kayoga; Jasper and Tiny Ryo 3. Kenrip was actually an artificial organism manufactured in a lab. 4. The island is supposed to be of two giant mechs standing [illegible] battle. Like "Bad hand [illegible] Brothers"

[illegible] Microverse Central [illegible] 59 Star Wars [illegible] X-Men "The Man-Thing"


ULT

MADE DC

BY THE WIZARD STAFF

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DRAXHALL JUMP STUDIO

What if WIZARD reimagined the **DC Universe** using the Ultimate formula?

THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE BEGINS NOW.

With Marvel's Ultimate success, fans have been clamoring, "When is DC Comics gonna Ultimize its universe?" Since DC's unlikely to do it (reps have said so publicly) we figured we might as well take a crack at it.

Why should Stan Lee hog all the fun "reimagining" DC's big guns? DC's comic book icons have stood the test of time enduring decades of reboots, revamps and rough times. They've seen new directions, new costumes and even new characters inside the costumes. All of them have persevered because the timeless core idea of each character has been more powerful than a speeding locomotive. It leaves us wondering how things would look if DC's big guns were relaunched Ultimate style.

We took the blueprints of what made Marvel's *Ultimate Spider-Man* and *Ultimate X-Men* a success, and built upon the characters' foundations, keeping 'em classic yet contemporary, with a wrinkle or three that adds something new to the mythos.

And we even went one step farther than just playing a what-if game: We hired the artists of Draxhall Jump Studio to see our ideas through from conception to coloring. We had such a blast with this, we even concocted storylines and subplots that could last years in our imaginary lil' universe.

After countless hours of planning, there's no doubt in our minds that these books could go toe-to-toe with the Ultimate Marvel Universe. And, faster than a speeding bullet, we'll now put our money where our mouth is.

ULTIMATE BATMAN

THE ORIGIN: Fifteen years ago, a 7-year-old Bruce Wayne watched helplessly as a two-bit crook gunned down his parents. As the young Wayne was shipped off to private schools, a young detective named James Gordon would be assigned to the case. It proves to be the one case he could never solve.

Fifteen years later, a changed Bruce Wayne returns to Gotham. Having all but disappeared from the public eye for the last few years, Wayne secretly trained himself to wage a one-man war on crime as the masked urban myth called Batman.

THE CHARACTER: Not the billionaire boob that so many fans are used to, Wayne's trained himself not just as the Dark Knight but also as a shrewd businessman. One of the wealthiest men in the world, Wayne's closest business rival is another young gun—Lex Luthor.

SUPPORTING CAST: Alfred Pennyworth represents the only family Wayne has left: An English manservant who served the Waynes for over 25 years, Alfred plays confidant, medic and sometimes psychiatrist to the man he thinks of as a son. In James Gordon's long career, the image of young Wayne weeping over his parents' lifeless bodies haunted him. After 20 years on the job, he ascends to police commissioner by turning the tables on the corrupt Gotham police force, using their own blackmail and strong-arm tactics against them. At Gordon's side stands Harvey Dent, Gotham's hotshot district attorney, who grew up with Bruce before the murders. Dent's engaged to Gordon's daughter, Barbara, a grad school student who can't resist combing for Internet reports of the mysterious Batman's nocturnal assault on crime.

THE SET-UP: After training for over a decade, Bruce Wayne returns to Gotham, and dons the cape and cowl of the Batman. Striking an alliance with Commissioner Gordon—despite D.A. Dent's protests—the Dark Knight sets out to set things right in Gotham City.

THE FIRST ARC: As Batman and Gordon wage war against Gotham's mob families, they learn someone has beaten them to it. Calling himself The Joker, this mysterious clown-themed vigilante's campaign on crime kills capos, criminals and any innocents who get in the way. Batman must match wits with this darker version of himself who's better at this game than he is.

THE BIG PICTURE: Batman's stellar cast of rogues will be introduced slowly and menacingly. Two growing subplots will culminate with issue #50, as Wayne fights Lex Luthor's hostile takeover of his company and as Batman, he once again confronts the Joker, who's learned that the high-tech Dark Knight could be only one man underneath that mask.

ULTIMATE SUPERMAN

THE ORIGIN: Rocketed from the dying planet Krypton, a lone baby lands in a Smallville, Kansas field. Adopted by Martha and Jonathan Kent, the infant is raised like any other child, but the Kents soon learn their adopted son Clark is anything but ordinary. Under the Earth's yellow sun, he's developed powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men.

THE CHARACTER: It's six years removed from the world of TV's "Smallville" where Clark, Lex Luthor and Lana Lang all grew up together as friends. Clark's just graduated from Kansas State University and has been offered an entry-level job at the *Daily Planet*.

SUPPORTING CAST: Lana's still Clark's girlfriend and one of the few people who knows about his extraordinary powers. But his long-distance relationship with Lana (who still resides in Smallville) is strained as Clark grows closer to fellow *Planet* reporter Lois Lane. Lois, a tenacious and clever reporter, is also the protegé of *Planet* senior writer Perry White, the man who mentors Lois and Clark in both their work and personal lives. And just as Clark settles in Metropolis, billionaire industrialist Lex Luthor reemerges after a four-year disappearance from public life. Although Clark looks forward to seeing his old friend from Smallville, something has clearly made Lex more intense, but Lex isn't talking.

THE SET UP: After learning to control and master his powers while growing up in Smallville, Clark Kent moves to Metropolis and dons a costume to help protect the world as Superman, a name Perry White gives him after seeing him save a sabotaged Air Force One.

THE FIRST ARC: Superman wasn't the only thing to escape Krypton. An artificial intelligence program developed by Jor-El, Superman's father, also reached Earth. Calling itself Brainiac I, the super-computer sets its sights on turning Earth into New Krypton... just as soon as it undoes the "damage" done to Krypton's Last Son by those who raised him human.

THE BIG PICTURE: As Clark tries to reestablish his friendship with Lex, he doesn't realize that Lex knows he's Superman! The catch: Lex refuses to admit it to himself. Lex feels that if Clark—who represents Lex's only tether to a humanity that has constantly betrayed him—has been lying to him their entire lives, it's Superman who has to pay the price.

ULTIMATE GREEN LANTERN

THE ORIGIN: Dishonorably discharged by the military's highly trained Delta Force, John Stewart's life is going nowhere...until he's recruited into the intergalactic police force called The Green Lantern Corps. A rookie grunt assigned to Sector 2814—Earth—Stewart's mentor is the Corps' most senior officer: Sinestro.

THE CHARACTER: No one knows why Stewart was thrown out of Delta Force but as he puts it, "I had one bad day." A social activist now in Los Angeles, Stewart's happy to serve out his days not fighting in anyone's wars, until he's given the power to truly make a difference.

SUPPORTING CAST: A slew of alien GLs fill the title, but Stewart's main interaction is with his training officer Sinestro. A brilliant strategist and one of the most powerful Green Lanterns ever, Sinestro will give John Stewart—and the reader—the vibe that this Green Lantern may be furthering a dark agenda.

THE SET-UP: Trained by Sinestro, Stewart quickly gains a reputation as a hotshot upstart. And, like his fellow officers on the GLC planet Oa, he still never sees their commanders called The Guardians, who are said to give the rings their power.

THE FIRST ARC: Think "Training Day" in outer space. The rookie GL asks, "What happened to the other Green Lanterns before me?" "Simple," says Sinestro with a smile. "It didn't work out." As Sinestro reveals his shadier side while the story progresses, Stewart grows more and more interested in just where the Guardians and his new ring and power battery come from.

THE BIG PICTURE: Over time, Stewart discovers the Guardians are dead—killed by Sinestro, who's been secretly running the Corps for some time now. He also learns that his mentor has been giving rings to inadequate Green Lanterns to dupe the various solar systems into a false sense of security, murdering any Corps member who gave Sinestro any potential opposition. His ultimate goal: the creation of robotic Manhunters deep inside Oa to destroy the flawed GL Corps, subjugate the planets under their protection and set Sinestro up as the conqueror of the galaxy.

ULTIMATE FLASH

Crime scene investigator Barry Allen works in one of the fastest cities in the world—Los Angeles. Called to a crime scene inside Cadmus Labs Research Facility (a subsidiary of LexCorp), Allen's collection of evidence accidentally exposes him to a host of experimental substances. Invisible to the naked eye, tasteless, odorless ...these compounds trigger something within Allen's biochemistry transforming him into the fastest man alive!

As one of the top crime scene investigators in the country, Barry Allen is often called upon to tackle L.A.'s most bizarre cases. A one-man crime lab thanks to his keen mind and inhuman speed, the fastest man alive now has what it takes to stay one step ahead of the criminals.

L.A. Detective Jay Garrick is Allen's best friend and the only person who knows he's secretly the Flash. Even Assistant District Attorney Iris West, Allen's off-again, on-again flame, doesn't know his secret. Of course, she's got her own problems now that she's taken in her young nephew Wally West after years of parental abuse. Making things harder for Allen is that the rebellious Wally doesn't trust any cop, even if they're dating his Aunt Iris.

After realizing he's gained the power to run faster than the speed of sound, Allen develops a slick running outfit to disguise his identity while investigating crimes as the Flash.

While experimenting with his powers, Barry discovers a downside to his abilities: the more he uses his speed, the faster his body shows signs of aging. But just as Barry begins to master his power and gets a lead on the serial killer Murmur, someone else with superhuman speed calling himself Black Flash arrives on the scene. What's worse, he knows all of Barry's secrets and wants the Scarlet Speedster dead.

"I'll never forgive you!" screams Black Flash as he pummels Allen in their first meeting. This grief-stricken foe stands revealed as none other than a future Wally West! Haunted for years by Wally's hatred, Allen eventually learns he'll make a wrong decision that costs the lives of two JLA teammates...and Iris West.

ULTIMATE WONDER WOMAN

THE ORIGIN: Born on the cloaked Mediterranean island of Themyscira, Princess Diana was trained since birth as an Amazon, using evolved Greek technology in its art of warfare. Blessed with her native Amazon abilities of superhuman strength and durability, the athletic princess earns the right through trial by combat to be the one to enter Man's World. But her office as emissary of peace is a ruse. Wonder Woman hasn't come to Man's World to foster relations, she's come as an advance spy for an Amazonian race bent on conquering it!

THE CHARACTER: Meet the ultimate warrior. Diana was trained not only as an Amazon soldier but also in the ways of the people she plans to deceive. In fact, her own battle gear has been purposely modeled after the U.S. flag's colors, to further endear her to the world's superpower nation.

SUPPORTING CAST: Steve Trevor, U.S. delegate to the United Nations, hires Diana as an advisor on international relations. The job perfectly suits Diana's mission as it's a means to not only survey the world's defenses but as a way to meet and access its top leaders.

THE FIRST ARC: Leaving Themyscira for the first time in her life, Diana comes to New York and is an immediate cultural icon to its people. But as Diana grows closer and more in touch with the outside world, she's not sure if she can carry out her Amazon duties. Nicknamed Wonder Woman by Trevor when she's seen in action, Diana slowly finds herself stepping in as guardian to a race she has vowed to conquer.

THE BIG PICTURE: After deciding that Man's World isn't as big a blight as her fellow Amazon's believe, Diana's forced to choose a side: fight alongside her new allies in the JLA or with the legions of her Amazon sisters? And how will her Justice League teammates—and the world—react when the truth behind the disappearance of men from Themyscira is revealed?

BATMAN
FLASH
JLA DATA FEED
LASHLEY
PARKIN
MARIANO
DH

ULTIMATE JLA

THE ORIGIN: Clark Kent—Superman—awakes with a start. Standing before him is the ghostly image of a shriveled, alien-looking creature. "He is coming," the apparition states before dissipating in the breeze. "He is coming."

The same strange visitation replays itself to John Stewart as he foils a bank robbery. To Bruce Wayne as he rides an elevator in WayneTech, to Barry Allen, and Wonder Woman, all of them telepathically warned by J'onn J'onzz, the last survivor of the planet Mars (shown bottom right). The same great evil that destroyed Mars is coming to Earth, and this Martian hunts men for a super-league capable of defeating it.

THE CHARACTERS: The Dark Knight, the Man of Stee , the Amazon, the Emerald Gladiator and the Fastest Man Alive come together as the JLA when J'onzz pleads to them for he p against an evil no one hero can defeat. "Mars burned for 200 years after he came," J'onzz says, "Everyone died. Everyone but me."

SUPPORTING CAST: Filling out the JLA's ranks is the Atom, a female scientist. In addition to shrinking her size to that of an atom, she can also adjust her body's mass while small. Also lending support is J'onzz, who acts as the team's intel igence gatherer, te epathic link and resident technology guru.

THE FIRST ARC: "After he destroyed Mars, he came to Earth," laments J'ozz to the newly formed League. "But there was nothing to conquer. He killed the dominant species—your dinosaurs—and marked your Earth as a viable future world to subjugate. His…no, its name is Despero, the immortal leader of h s war-like race. He comes alone, conquers by his own hand and proves his status of God to his people. I have felt his m nd. He is coming."

As the team races to learn everything they can about Despero and the Martian/human technology of the JLA's Manhattan HQ, Despero crashes to Earth in a fiery ball of death. Towering over seven feet tall, the alien wreaks havoc through the U N., brutally killing every delegate inside and donning the UN's flag as a symbol of his power. His next step is to murder the U.S. president, as Despero cuts a path of destruction through all U.S. resistance. Eventually catching up to him, the hastily assembled Justice League face the would-be conqueror as their first mission…and their first failure. Even though they eventually defeat Despero, they may soon have to contend with an entire *race* of Desperos; having retreated behind Saturn, the rudderless army gives pause to ponder what to do with the one planet that's managed to defeat their god.

THE BIG PICTURE: A few storyarcs in, Superman decides the League members need to know more about each other to work better as a team. As the members reveal their secret IDs and powers, the spotlight fa ls on a reluctant Batman, setting the stage as the untrusting Dark Knight turns his back on the League…and then systematica ly defeats them all, just in time for a new villain called The Key to unlock the gates of Hell

ZANTHER
PARKIN
DRAXHALL

ULTIMATE TEEN TITANS

THE ORIGIN: It's 'N Sync meets superheroes. When the JLA emerges as media darlings after their battle with Despero, LexCorp manufactures its own superteam. Gathering a group of hip, good-looking teenagers with superhuman abilities, Luthor's PR team designs marketable codenames and costumes for each. Calling them the "Teen Titans" (a name the team hates), Luthor now has a cash-cow bonanza first, "superhero" team second.

THE CHARACTERS: Placing ads in all the Hollywood trades, LexCorp holds auditions for the team. First to sign on is a young acrobat named Rich Grayson, who desperately wants to escape his life in the carnival act with his parents. Coming prepared with the codename "Nightwing," he's more than a little disappointed to instead be labeled "Robin." Then there's Raven, a mysterious goth-chick who spent years living on the streets through a combination of street smarts and her control of her "living darkness." Escaping from the island of Themyscira was easy for Donna (who creates a last name in Troy), but escaping her big sister Diana's shadow may be harder; Donna is given the codename Power Girl (instead of the proposed name "Wonder Girl" to avoid trademark infringement with the JLA's Wonder Woman), which suits her fine since she wishes her presence in Man's World remain secret from her Amazon sisters. The arrogant Prince Arturrs of Atlantis, a 19-year-old future king called Aquaman, wants to familiarize himself with the surface world before taking up his royal responsibilities; he insists he's the team's natural leader, much to the chagrin of the others. Roy Harper—given the name Green Arrow—was raised on an Indian reservation learning deadshot marksmanship with his bow; the wildcard of the team, Roy takes immense pleasure in ribbing teammates (like calling Robin "Dick," or Aquaman "Artie"). The final piece to the Teen Titans make-up is accident victim Victor Stone, who LexCorp rebuilt as Cyborg.

THE FIRST ARC: Marketed as a pop-star superteam, the Teen Titans are sent out to battle low-level supervillains and thugs, allowing decisive victories. But when the team discovers Green Arrow overdosing on Ecstasy after a rave with Raven, the Titans secretly buck their bosses in their off-hours to get their hands dirty. They take out an E lab without telling LexCorp, which wants to keep the team's image squeaky clean. During the raid though, Power Girl accidentally kills a dealer, creating rifts among members. What's worse—keeping all of their extracurricular activities on the downlow proves tougher than they ever imagined, particularly when members like Green Arrow, Raven and Cyborg refuse to participate!

THE BIG PICTURE: With a murder hanging over the team's collective heads, the Titans still participate in more nightly raids on drug dealers and gang-bangers. But as time goes on, their meta-human vigilante activities spark the first Ultimate DC crossover by attracting the attention of a rival team: the Justice League.

The Main Events

BEST OF THE BEST

by Andy Serwin

WIZARD ranks the big breakout events of 2002 that raised eyebrows, dropped jaws and blew the doors off the comic biz

What separates the phenomenon from the flash in the pan, the truism from the trendy or the icons from the con jobs?

Two words: breakout factor.

A breakout is an event that does better than anyone's wildest expectations. A breakout is an obscure project that comes out of left field to receive critical acclaim. A breakout is a person who bursts onto the scene to receive unending praise and admiration for their work. A breakout is all these things, and 2002 had its fair share of them.

"I really think 2002 was a year to remember," agrees Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada. "It was an incredible year creatively, probably one of the greatest ever, if not the greatest. The comics industry as a whole put out product in 2002 that I believe will live on for a long time after we're gone."

The year began on a high note with the success of DC's 10-cent Batman comic, and that momentum only continued to build following the release of the "Spider-Man" movie, which not only earned over $800 million (and counting) worldwide, it also set the stage for a comic book renaissance.

So that begs the question: In this year of near-unprecedented success, what people and events made the biggest splash and broke out into comics consciousness? Read on and find out, as *Wizard* ranks the biggest breakouts of 2002!

8. 'Spider-Man'

Who in the world would have imagined that a story about a scrawny high school nerd bitten by a spider would become the fifth highest-grossing film in America?

People knew that Columbia Pictures' "Spider-Man" movie was going to recoup its $100 million budget, but eight times over? Nobody's Spider-sense was tingling that much!

"['Spider-Man'] was incredibly helpful, but I believe it's going to stick a bit more than things did with the 'Batman' movie," expresses Quesada, whose employer, Marvel Comics, reaped a windfall of benefits from the hit film. As an industry, we're in better shape today to take advantage of something like 'Spider-Man.' The fact that this industry hit [rock-bottom] merely four years ago—and it's still fresh in our minds—makes us all smarter businessmen.

Starring hot up-and-coming stars like Tobey Maguire (Peter Parker/Spider-Man), Kirsten Dunst (Mary Jane Watson) and James Franco (Harry Osborne), "Spider-Man" touched a nerve with moviegoers because of the faithful way director Sam Raimi captured the angst and dynamics of the Spider-Man mythos, from Peter's emotional relationship with Mary Jane to the Green Goblin's hatred for the wall-crawler.

Also helping the cause was Raimi's use of cutting-edge, movie-making technology, including computer-generated scenes that perfectly captured Spider-Man's superhuman abilities. The Spider-scenes not only looked great, they looked *believable*.

The fallout from the film's monstrous, unexpected success was felt all across the comic book industry, as comics underwent a renaissance in sales and creativity thanks to an influx of new readers hungry to feed their Spider-Man cravings. Back issues of old Spider-Man comics were suddenly hot commodities, and sales for the core Spider-Man titles—*Amazing*, *Peter Parker* and *Ultimate Spider-Man*—hit new highs.

7. Heritage Auctions

For the Heritage Comics Auction House, number crunching in 2002 required the help of top NASA mathematicians.

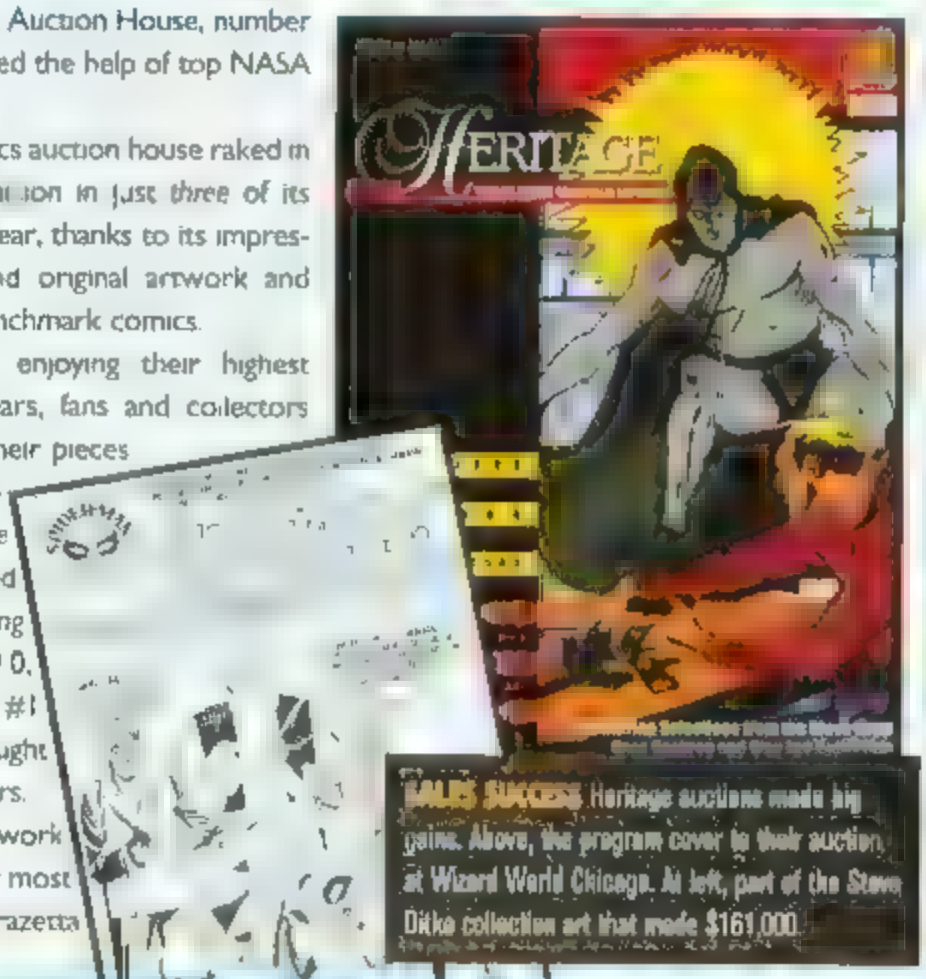
The prestigious comics auction house raked in a mind-blowing $13.8 million in just *three* of its Signature Auctions this year, thanks to its impressive offerings of high-end original artwork and high-graded copies of benchmark comics.

With comic books enjoying their highest recognition factor in years, fans and collectors were lining up to grab their pieces of comics history. High-quality copies of *Police Comics* #1 (CGC-graded 9.2, $19,550), *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (CGC 9.0, $44,275) and *Batman* #1 (CGC 8.0, $57,500) brought in unprecedented numbers.

But it was original artwork that was the top draw for most collectors. Two Frank Frazetta paintings netted $160,425 at the Heritage auction back in March while a complete Steve Ditko-drawn issue of *Amazing Spider-Man* #10 raked in a staggering $161,000 at the Heritage Auction back on July 5-7 at Wizard World Chicago which also featured several big-ticket items from Stan Lee's personal collection.

"The results were amazing," enthuses John Petty, director of auctions for Heritage Comics. "The market is incredibly strong at the high end right now."

And if the spectacular results from October's Signature Auction are any indication ($5.2 million, thanks in large part to actor Nicolas Cage auctioning off his premium collection), comics' speculator boom looks to loom even larger in 2003.



SALES SUCCESS Heritage auctions made big gains. Above, the program cover to their auction at Wizard World Chicago. At left, part of the Steve Ditko collection art that made $161,000.

6. Axel Alonso

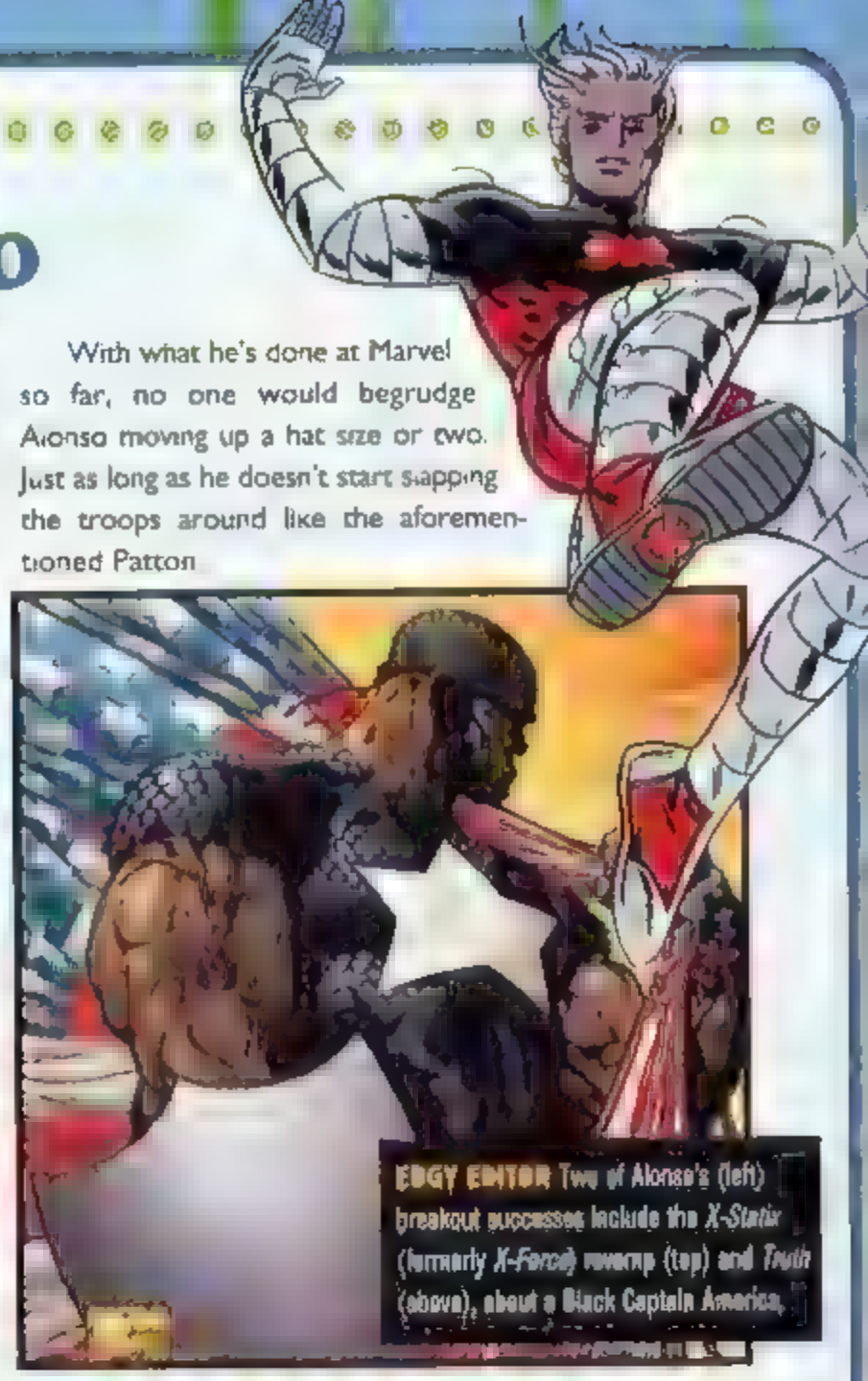
When President Franklin Roosevelt wanted some heads cracked during World War II, he sent in General Patton. When Marvel wanted to kick-start some of its lagging titles, they turned to their big gun editor; Axel Alonso.

A former editor at DC's mature reader Vertigo imprint, Alonso earned a reputation for having an uncanny knack to develop talent and for being a collaborator that creators wanted to work with. When Marvel restructured its editorial department in 2001, Alonso got the call. He quickly stood out as Marvel's top editor thanks to his work on top-selling 2002 projects like the Spider-titles and *Incredible Hulk*, as well as critically acclaimed series like *X-Statix* (formerly *X-Force*) and *Truth*, plus his latest gig—Marvel's top mutant, *Wolverine*.

"Axel has been an incredible addition," remarks Quesada. "He gives us some very important chops and he helps teach our young crew a lot. Axel under a different publisher might not be allowed to be Axel."

And taking a good-natured dig at his right-hand man, Quesada quips, "But we don't want Axel's head swelling any more than it already has."

With what he's done at Marvel so far, no one would begrudge Alonso moving up a hat size or two. Just as long as he doesn't start swapping the troops around like the aforementioned Patton.



EDGY EDITOR Two of Alonso's (left) breakout successes include the *X-Statix* (formerly *X-Force*) revamp (top) and *Truth* (above), about a Black Captain America.

5. Pat Lee

If he ever wants out of comics, Pat Lee's got a heck of a career as an auto mechanic. Hell, he brought back to life a fleet of cars that'd been dead for 10 years!

Through sheer force of will, an undying love of the property and his talent for crafting ultra-detailed, insanely intricate splash scenes, Lee revived the Transformers franchise and helped spark an '80s nostalgia revival. *G.I. Joe* may have been the first '80s book out, but Lee and his Dreamwave Productions team capitalized on the trend and expanded on it as well, capturing a whole new generation of readers thanks to high-octane stories with eye-popping visuals. Throw in the new wave of toys, cartoons and merchandise that followed, and that's what you'd call the ultimate jump-start.

"Pat Lee draws the Transformers like they need to be drawn," gushes Phil Jimenez, Wonder Woman writer/ artist and admitted Transformers maniac. "I can't think of another artist who could draw these characters. He's *born* to draw them."

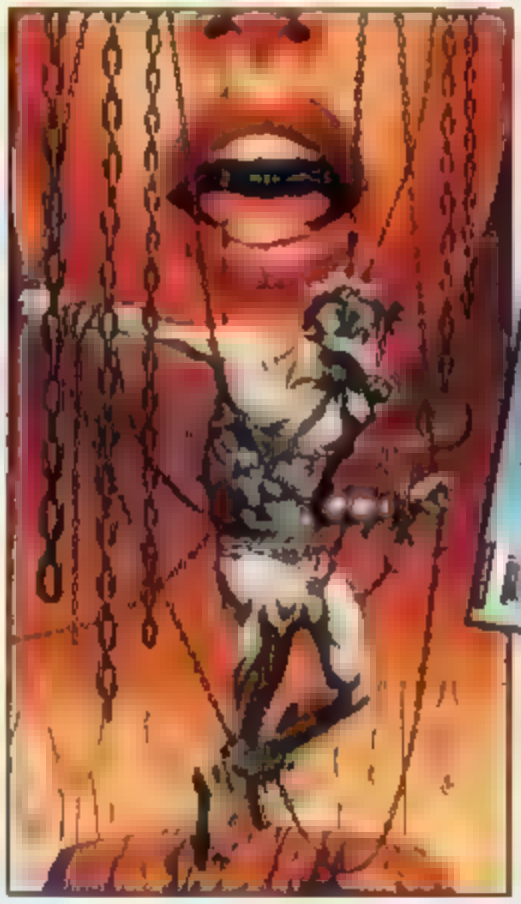
STEEL APPEAL Lee (left) parlayed his love for the Transformers (above) into a phenomenal retro success.

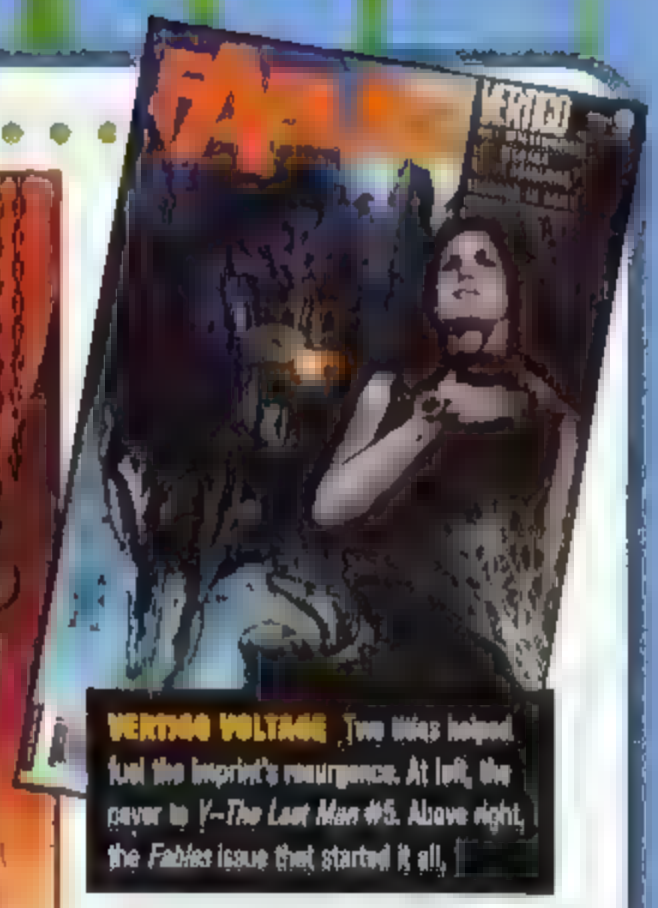
And Lee's proved he's a savvy businessman as well. Dreamwave split from Image Comics just as he and his cohorts were wrangling the Transformers publishing rights from Hasbro. When that deal was finalized, Dreamwave suddenly found itself as the spearhead in the '80s nostalgia wave.

Riding high on the success of the Transformers books, Dreamwave is pursuing other licensed publishing ventures, such as *Dungeons and Dragons* and *Magic: The Gathering*, both of which are still in negotiations.

Maybe "Pat Lee: Auto Mechanic" doesn't have quite the ring to it as "Pat Lee: Comic Book Trailblazer."

4. Vertigo





VERTIGO VOLTAGE Two titles helped fuel the imprint's resurgence. At left, the cover to *Y—The Last Man* #5. Above right, the *Fables* issue that started it all.

In 2002, Vertigo Comics reached a whole new dizzying height.

Fueled by *Fables* and *Y—The Last Man* (two of the hottest series of the year), Mike Carey's much-anticipated run on *Hellblazer* and the fact that *100 Bullets* continues to roll along as one of the best-written series in comics, Vertigo stood tall in 2002 as the most intelligent, entertaining and thought-provoking publisher in comics.

Fables and *Y—The Last Man* have emerged from the dark corner of the DC Universe and have generated unheard of amounts of buzz and critical acclaim. *Y* quickly sold out of its first three issues, and since its debut in August, *Fables* has climbed a whopping 29 spots to crack Diamond's Top 100 sellers list. The trend has attracted the interest of other creators, who are now looking to bring their projects to the house that Gaiman and Ennis built.

"The cool thing about working at Vertigo, for me, is they're letting me do a fairly mainstream project that's kind of superhero-y," explains Phil Jimenez, who is spinning his own Vertigo launch for fall 2003. "I think Vertigo's starting to spread its wings a little more."

And it was with that attitude that Vertigo welcomed its two current hit-makers: Brian K. Vaughan and Bill Willingham.

If you're not in the know, *Y—The Last Man*, by Vaughan and Pia Guerra, tells the adventures of Yorick Brown and his helper monkey, Ampersand, the only survivors of a deadly plague that wipes out all male mammals on Earth. In *Fables*, Willingham has crafted a scathingly funny look at a group of fairy tale characters that are forced to live in the world of the "mundanes" (i.e. humans).

Wanna give your brain a workout? Pick up a Vertigo book the next time you're at the store. We promise you won't need any Dramamine.

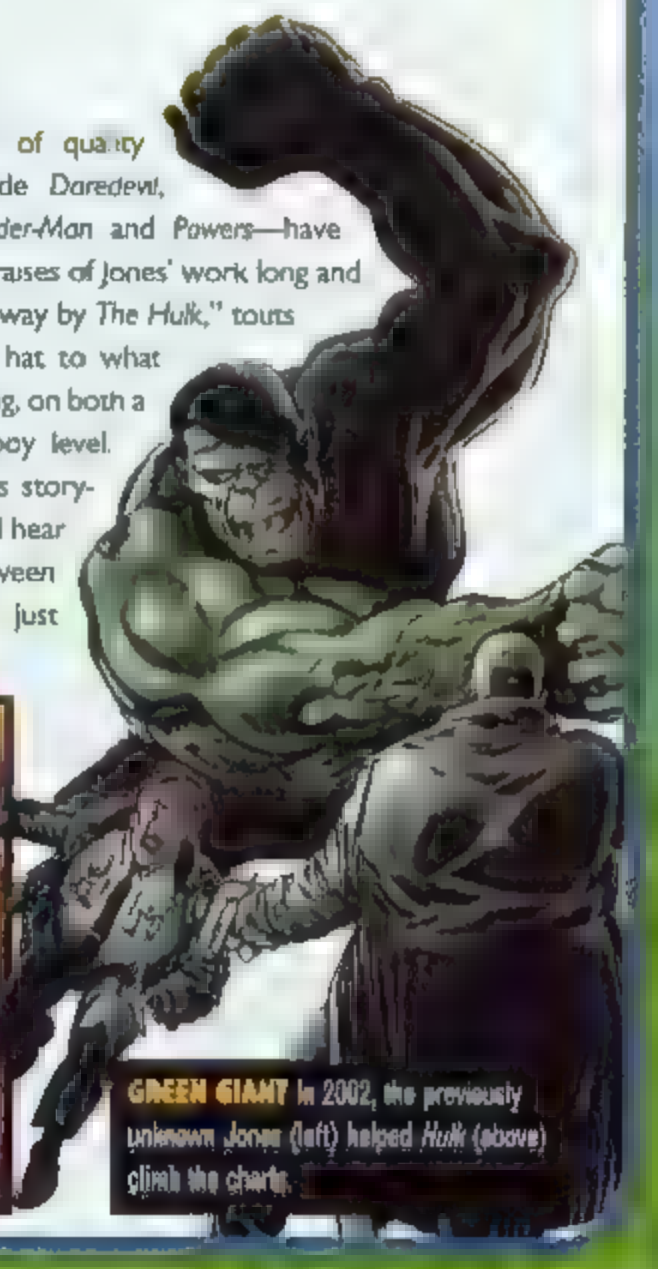
3. Bruce Jones

Writer Bruce Jones has pumped more muscle into *The Incredible Hulk* than a truckload of steroids.

Given a caveat by Marvel to make *The Incredible Hulk* book a Top 20 seller by the time Universal's "Hulk" film hit, Jones took over the writing chores for Marvel's Green Goliath late in 2001, but it was during the past year he really hit his stride on the title. Gone are the "Fistfights of the Month with Some Giant Bruiser" stories. They have been replaced by a "Fugitive"-style man-on-the-run nail-biter: Bruce Banner, accused of murdering a young boy in Chicago while acting as the Hulk, is now on the run from legitimate law enforcement and a shadowy government agency that wants to use Banner's blood as a super-weapon.

According to Marvel E-I-C Joe Quesada, Jones has transformed *Hulk* into "one of the absolute best books in the industry right now. Casting him on *Hulk* was a stroke of sheer inspiration by [editor] Axel [Alonso]. Movie or no movie, *Hulk* is finally what it was meant to be and what it should be."

And his employer isn't the only one raving about Jones' run on Hulk. Other pros—like Brian Michael Bendis, who writes a quartet of quality books that include *Daredevil*, *Alias*, *Ultimate Spider-Man* and *Powers*—have been singing the praises of Jones' work long and loud. "I'm blown away by *The Hulk*," touts Bendis. "I tip my hat to what Bruce Jones is doing, on both a technical and fanboy level. That's just kick-ass storytelling. Whenever I hear comparisons between me and Bruce, I just say thanks."



GREEN GIANT In 2002, the previously unknown Jones (left) helped *Hulk* (above) climb the charts.

2. HeroClix

What do you get when you mix gamers with comic book fans? It used to be bloodshed, but these days, it's just the hottest superhero game in town.

WizKids' HeroClix franchise, featuring versions that include Marvel and DC's top icons (with an "IndyClix" edition starring characters from Dark Horse, CrossGen and Top Cow on the way), has done the near impossible: It's brought together hardcore gamers and *uber*-fanboys without either clique bitching about table space at the local collectible shop.

Not only does HeroClix allow players to adopt the identities of their favorite villains and heroes (you can play as such icons as Superman, Spider-Man, Batman or Wolverine), if you're feeling adventurous, you can choose a team consisting of Commissioner Jim Gordon and a squadron of Gotham cops or, if you're more the B-grade villain type, draft a team of baddies like Whirlwind, Mr. Hyde and Klaw to wreck shop with.

The game mechanics allow players to jump right in and get started; it's just a matter of rolling the dice and utilizing the easy-to-follow rulebook/player's guide. And if you wanna go a[bo]ut, feel free to build enormous, elaborate sets to play on much like the *Wizard* gang did. We've got model replicas of Stark Enterprises, OzCorp and the Champions' HQ! Or if you don't feel like bu lding them yourself, do some online searches to find vendors who prefabricate those famous comic landmarks. Once you get the hang of the game, we guarantee you'll understand why this tabletop game is one of the biggest breakout successes of the year.

CLIX QUIZ Can you guess which HeroClix are [illegible]? Answer below...!

Answer: Hawkgirl, Wonder Woman, Capt. Marvel and Green Arrow are all custom jobs. For part 2 of this quiz, test your knowledge in the HeroClix price guide on page 172 right now!

1. '30 Days of Night'

Perhaps Steve Niles started out the year eating franks and beans, but he could finish up 2002 with a fine meal of filet mignon and Dom Perignon

And it's all thanks to a below-the-radar, independent mini-series that sported such a unique premise, it wound up the subject of a million-dollar Hollywood bidding war

With Idea + Design Works Publishing's *30 Days of Night*, Niles not only made a big splash across the comics landscape, he wound up capturing the imaginations—and financial advances—of Hollywood's biggest power brokers

30 Days of Night, featuring truly chilling art by Ben Templesmith, relates the story of a pack of vicious vampires who descend upon the small Alaskan town of Barrow. The vamps have come for a month-long feeding frenzy, as they can walk fearlessly around the small, isolated burg because of the 30 days of complete darkness the town gets hit with every year. It's up to the town's sheriff and his deputy wife to keep the surviving humans safe, find a way to get help and destroy the vampires before the entire town is rendered a memory

MONSTER SMASH *30 Days of Night* was such a runaway success that its movie rights were gobbled up before the last issue hit.

TELL ME WHERE THE OTHERS ARE HIDING
I DON'T KNOW. THEY LEFT BEFORE YOU GOT HERE.
LIE NOBODY GOT AWAY
WHERE ARE YOU GOING, SHERIFF? YOU THINK YOU CAN OUTMANEUVER ME?

Ironically enough, *30 Days of Night* started out as a straight movie pitch, which Niles shopped around for months.

"[The pitch] sat around for a few years," he explains. "When I finally started shopping it around, I pitched it to 15 or 20 people and got no reaction at all."

After pitching it as a comic series to Dark Horse Comics and Todd McFarlane Productions with no luck, Niles turned to his old friends, Ted Adams and Beau Smith, who were starting up a small comic publisher called IDW Publishing, an offshoot of Idea + Design Works, a professional design company that worked in video games, commercial advertising and DVD production.

When IDW Publishing began sending out the press releases announcing the comic project, Creative Artists Agency (C.A.A.), one of the top talent agencies in Hollywood, jumped at the chance to rep the property and began shopping it around to Tinseltown's biggest movers and shakers, including MGM, Jerry Bruckheimer, Dreamworks and "Spider-Man" director Sam Raimi. It was Raimi's production company, Senator International, that walked away with the film rights—but it was Niles who walked away with a million-dollar payday and the chance to write the screenplay for the movie adaptation of his comic mini-series.

"It's the best, it really is," exclaims Niles, the self-described "mid-30s"-aged scribe who's been working professionally in comics since he was 19. "It's an opportunity to write full time. I want to do movies, comics and books, and this is the chance to show people what I can do."

But Niles' task is far from over. He's now hip-deep in the scriptwriting process, and he's working very closely with Raimi in preparation to get "30 Days of Night" into production.

"We've met three times weekly for the past few months," notes Niles of his collaboration with Raimi. "He is a great guy. Great, smart, patient; everything I could have imagined."

One thing Niles could never have imagined when he first broke into the biz was this type of windfall. Niles founded his own company called Arcane Comics, but after awhile, "I folded the company when it became obvious I was a terrible businessman," he recounts.

No problem there Steve; you could always make a living off that writing thing.

Associate Editor Andy Serwin's biggest breakout achievement occurred on his face the day after he ate a pound of chocolate in one sitting.

BEST OF THE 2002

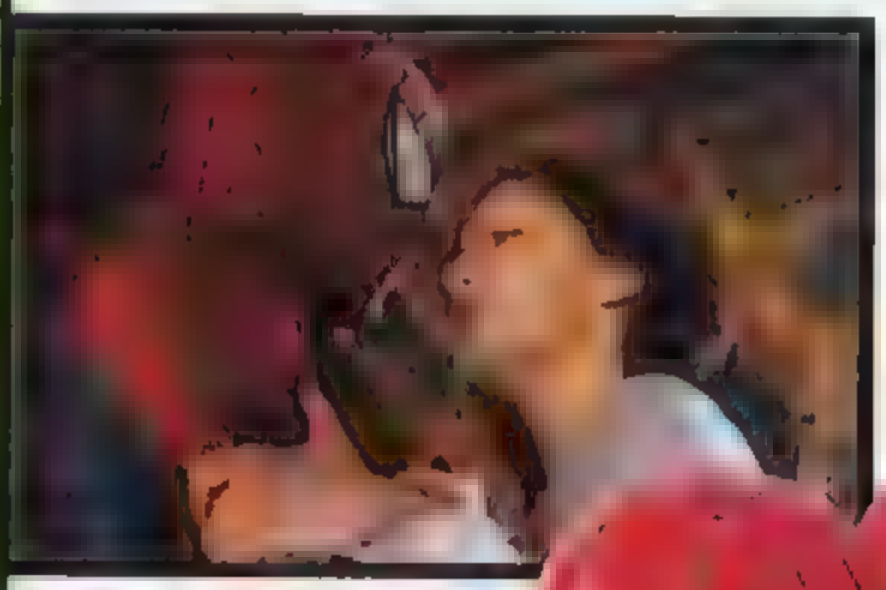
From Leagues to Rogues, WIZARD picks the finest 2002 had to offer

By the WIZARD Staff

BEST HERO
Movie Spider-Man

In 2002, an irradiated spider didn't just infect Peter Parker—it infected the entire nation and we believed a man could swing!

What made Spider-Man *Wizard*'s hero of the year wasn't just his huge box office or popularity, but the fact that when fans saw "Spider-Man," they saw a living, breathing comic book. Director Sam Raimi ("Evil Dead") and star Tobey Maguire ("Wonder Boys") captured the complex and troubled but yet still fun-loving and charming Peter Parker, and special effect guru John Dykstra made us believe CGI was the way to make our comic book heroes swing to life



"Spider-Man" the film played Peter Parker just like the neurotic, self-conscious teen comic fans have come to love from Spidey's monthly titles. The film's fight with Flash Thompson (when Peter first uses his newfound spider-powers) made us cheer with fanboy glee, Peter's first attempts at web-shooting ("Shazam! Go web!") made us laugh and the love story between Peter and Mary Jane Watson was both romantic and sad—just like the comics

Even Raimi directs credit right back to the inspiration for the "Spider-Man" film.

"I hope [fans see] we captured the character of Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's great creation," says Raimi. 'And even though they created him, so many great writers and artists over the years have made it their own, too. He's a part of every American kid's head. I hope everyone sees we tried to stick to the feeling of the comic book."

What really made the Spider-Man of Hollywood stand out from his comic counterpart was the fact that the Spidey on screen was fresh. Unencumbered by a separation from his wife, years of continuity or a clone, movie Spidey came off as a new character reinvigorated for the 21st century

All in all, the film version of Spider-Man wasn't just a hero to comic fans and moviegoers, but a hero to the actual comic industry, which was saddled with low sales and an ebbing self-esteem about a dying field of heroes.

But "Spider-Man" did more than just get retailers, creators and fans excited again—it got them all passionate. And Spidey didn't need any extra webbing, super-strength or even his spider-sense to do it. All he had to do was show up and remind us all just why comics are so much fun.

For the first time in memory, the public at large didn't immediately associate superheroes with flimsy books for kids but instead with your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man. And that association led to a huge resurgence in comic shop traffic and sales. The over-$800 million gross of "Spider-Man" was just the shot in the arm comics needed—and needed badly. Not only did comics have a new hero but so did the entire country as Spider-mania caught on.

Suddenly, it was cool to be a comic fan again.

After an opening weekend that grossed $114 million, high school students wore Spider-Man T-shirts without fear or ridicule, youngsters played with web-shooter toys in their backyards and offices around the country found Spider-Man action figures on the desks of accountants, lawyers and even psychoanalysts.

"The 'Spider-Man' movie effects were huge for us," says Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada. "We could talk sales all day long, but the intangible of this is the words 'comic books' hitting the mainstream press. That was huge. I'm a Marvel employee, but I'm a non-denominational comic books promoter."

■ MIKE COTTON

HERO WORSHIP Director Sam Raimi's spot-on portrayal of Spider-Man and his love affair with Mary Jane Watson (Kirsten Dunst) makes movie Spidey our Best Hero of the Year.

BEST COMIC

The Ultimates

What kind of world is it when Captain America—the living embodiment of the American Spirit—kicks a man when he's down? Or when Hank Pym (a.k.a. Giant-Man), a brilliant and respected doctor of biogenetics, sends a swarm of ants to devour his wife? Or better still, when Bruce Banner transforms into the savage Hulk just to impress his girlfriend?

What kind of world is it? Simple. A world we look forward to each and every month.

By serving up a healthy dose of reality, a little controversy and knock-you-on-yer-ass action, *The Ultimates*, Marvel's Ultimate take on the Avengers, proved in 2002 that, when it comes to superhero comics, it became the standard by which all other titles would be judged.

"*The Ultimates* is a book where you know you're in for 22 pages of just pure craziness," exclaims *Exiles* writer Judd Winick. "I only wish it was longer."

It all starts with character development, which series writer Mark Millar sets the bar for in terms of portraying superheroes as real people. Long gone are the Avengers of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's day; as much power as these heroes possess, they're far from perfect. The manic depressive Giant-Man pops Prozac like Tic-Tacs, Iron Man could drink a gang of Hell's Angels under the table and still buy another round, and Thor comes off as a delusional enviro-freak who thinks he's a god.

While the first four issues of the series built up the team as a group of government-funded badasses, the Ultimates were put to the "ultimate" test in issue #5.

Banner finally reaches his breaking point when Betty Ross, the love of his life, leaves him for Freddie Prinze Jr. It doesn't help matters that he's become the resident joke of the team (his teammates compare him to the likes of Woody Allen and Stuart Little), so to prove his worth, Banner gives the Ultimates their first mission—to take down the Hulk. After the Gray Goliath destroys most of midtown Manhattan in less than 10 minutes (all while threatening to do unspeakable sexual acts to Ross), the Ultimates finally arrive on the scene, and what takes place can only be described as one of the most intense and violent fights in comics history.

Hulk levels the ever-arrogant Giant-Man without breaking a gamma-irradiated sweat, threatening to use Pym's skull for his own personal toilet. Then he runs into a severely ticked-off Cap, who, in a matter of seconds, manages to put a serious hurt on the man-monster—albeit momentarily. The Hulk even takes not one, not two, but three shots from Mjolnir—and still keeps fighting! It isn't until Janet Pym (a.k.a. the Wasp) flies into Hulk's ear to deliver a series of electro-blast wasp stings to his brain that he finally goes down for the count. And just as Hulk transforms back into the uber-pathetic Banner, Cap delivers a size-12 boot across the desperate scientist's face—just to make sure he's learned his lesson.

Characters and conflicts aside, *The Ultimates* never slacks off on the shock factor. While serving as the ultimate example of conceit in the first four issues, Giant-Man can't seem to get over how quickly the Hulk handed his ass to him. Enter Janet, who makes the mistake of trying to console her husband. A heated argument erupts into a superpowered case of domestic battery. After blows ensue, Pym douses the shrunken Wasp with a can of Raid, then sics an army of ants on her to finish the job. Without showing the slightest bit of remorse, the man who can grow up to 70 feet tall simply admonishes his battered wife, "You shouldn't have made look small, Jan.'

SMASHING DEBUT When the Hulk finally showed up to wreck New York, fans got a close-up look at how good *Ultimates* was going to be, as the Cap/Hulk showdown attests.

While the stories in *Ultimates* throttle the reader, the pages of incredibly detailed artwork by series penciler Bryan Hitch prove worthy of a gallery hanging. The scenes of New York (which Hitch heavily researched before taking on the job) look better than postcards off the street as he manages to perfectly capture Times Square and Grand Central Station (that is, before the Hulk decimates 'em). And the pages after the Hulk's rampage can only be described as a post-apocalyptic nightmare of ruin and chaos.

"Millar tells a superhero story unlike no other," praises Chris Bachalo, who will pencil the upcoming *Ultimate War* crossover (where the Ultimates and the X-Men square off). "He makes everything so realistic. As far as Hitch's art, there's no way I'm going to be able to fill those shoes."

With heaping helpings of realism, controversy and mind-blowing art, *The Ultimates* clearly stands as not only the best book of the year, but the most powerful take on Marvel's Ultimate concept yet. ■ **CASEY SEIJAS**

BEST WRITER

Brian Azzarello

When a pro sports player wins back-to-back MVP awards, he's labeled "future Hall of Famer."

That said, if the comics industry is anything like athletics, then it's clear we've still got years of incredible Brian Azzarello stories to look forward to. With a 2002 résumé that included *100 Bullets*, *Hellblazer*, *Cage* and *Batman/Deathblow*, it's clear that Azzarello not only wowed fans, but his fellow creators as well.

"It's no surprise that practically every artist I speak to wants to work with him," says Will Dennis, who edits Azzarello on *100 Bullets* and *Hellblazer*. "The scary thing is that he's still relatively new to the game, so I anticipate the best is yet to come. He's only just beginning to kick ass and takes names—watch this space."

For the second year in a row, Azzarello claims the bragging rights that go along with being named *Wizard*'s Best Writer.

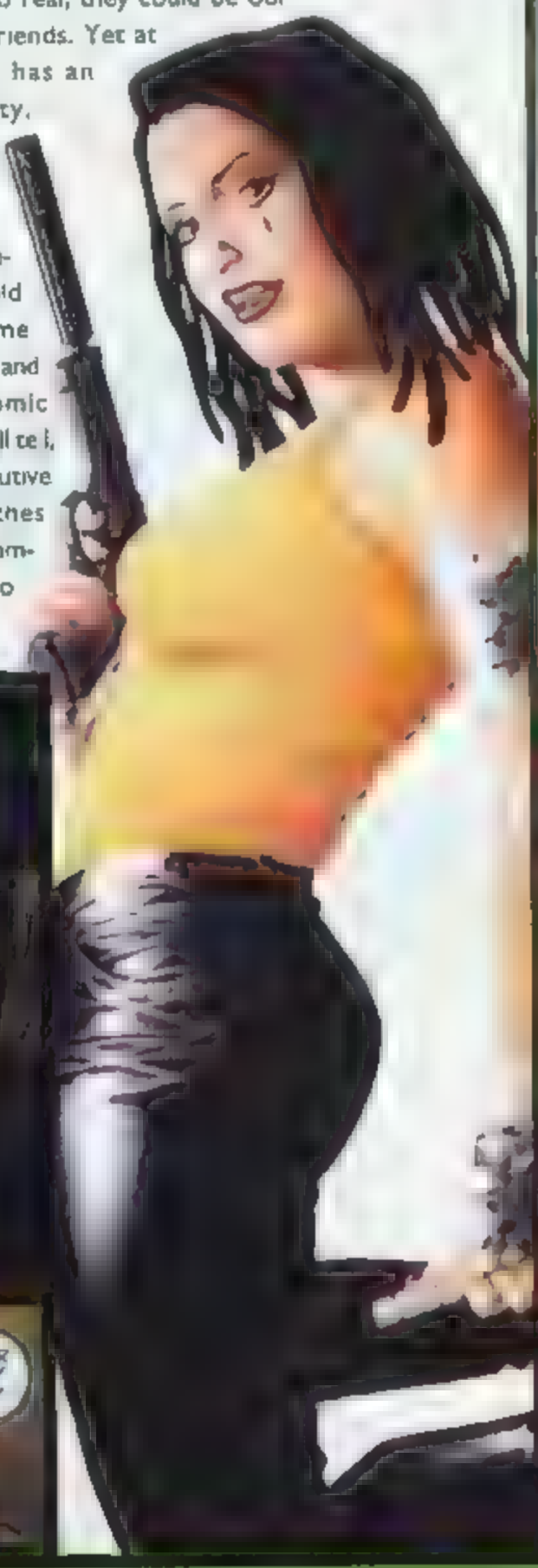
This year, Azzarello added two new mini-series to his repertoire: Marvel/MAX's *Cage* and DC/WildStorm's *Batman/Deathblow*. *Cage* revitalized a character long regarded as a tiara-wearing blaxploitation joke while *Batman/Deathblow*, a series which saw the Caped Crusader trying to solve the murder of one of WildStorm's staples, left Bat-fans begging for more Azzarello-written Dark Knight Detective stories.

Yet it's Azzarello's ongoing work for DC/Vertigo that further solidified the writer as the best the biz had to offer in 2002. Despite the fact that he's known for sizzling scripts that contain more twists than a yoga class, even his biggest fans didn't see what John Constantine had coming in *Hellblazer*—Azzarello literally killed the character. And while the shocking and grotesque death of Constantine may have surprised his fans, it's Azzarello's attention to detail and flair for *über*-realistic dialogue that made his run on *Hellblazer* the best since the series began.

Then of course, there's *100 Bullets*, Vertigo's cult phenomenon that's ever so subtly become the line's flagship title. With *100 Bullets*, Azzarello has proven that, while it's obvious he has an inherent knack for dialogue and details, his true strength lies in his story plotting. Month in and month out, another piece of the vast and elaborate puzzle fell into place, and readers slowly began to realize that, once this finite series wraps, it could be held in the same regard as masterpieces like *Watchmen* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*.

"Brian is very intelligent when it comes to the development of each story," praises *100 Bullets* penciler Eduardo Risso. "He writes incredible cliffhangers and creates some of the most brilliant characters which seem so real, they could be our neighbors or even friends. Yet at the same time, he has an uncommon humility, which comes out in his personality as well as his work."

So would it be premature for us to hold Azzarello in the same regard as Alan Moore and other legendary comic writers? Only time will tell, but with two consecutive "Best Writer" notches under his belt, the championships are set to keep rollin' in. ■



LIFE OF BRIAN Azzarello must encounter some whacked-out sh— to come up with great stories like *Batman/Deathblow* and *100 Bullets* (inset).

BEST ARTIST

John Cassaday

His art wasn't just in your face; it had something to say

A man on a mission, *Wizard*'s choice for Best Artist of 2002 was determined to let nothing stand in the way of getting his objective across.

After experiencing the tragic events of 9/11 firsthand, *Captain America* artist and New York native John Cassaday's approach to Cap was honed and defined. His intent? To channel the flood of emotions coursing through his mind and body and create something that would truly reflect the embodiment of Marvel's American icon.

"John's work has presence," comments *Captain America* writer John Ney Rieber. "Like the Great Wall of China or an atomic bomb has presence. You don't see his composition, technique or even the borders of the panels. You're just in the story—you're there and it's real. That's how good he is."

Best known for his combination of clean yet incredibly detailed artwork and fluid storytelling, Cassaday has been wowing fans and fellow artists alike for years with projects like *Union Jack* and *Planetary*.

"The first time I saw his work was on *Union Jack*," recalls Jae Lee, who will be tackling the Star-Spangled Avenger next year with a four-issue *Cap* arc titled "Ice." "Even back then, you could tell his sensibilities would set him apart from other artists. Reading his books is like watching a movie."

But in a time when America truly needed a real American hero, it was Cassaday, alongside scribe Ney Rieber, who stepped up to the plate. Delivering one of the most powerful and poignant Captain America tales to date ("Enemy," issues #1-#6), Cassaday solidified his place at the top of 2002's list of artistic contenders.

A captivating blend of elegance and raw power, Cassaday's pages weave the surreal and the striking to form moments that resonate with readers long after they've closed the comic. His cinematic approach to layout and composition draws readers in, guiding not only the eyes, but also the emotions. Drawing inspiration from his own haunted memories of the Sept. 11 tragedy, Cassaday's images (such as an exhausted Steve Rogers desperately digging for survivors through the wreckage of the World Trade Center bombing, Cap diving from a helicopter headfirst into the war-ravaged streets of Centerville, or a Cap who's forced to snap terrorist Faysal al-Tariq's neck) illustrate what Cap embodies, as well as the sacrifices that a true hero must make in the name of freedom.

Cassaday's Cap isn't a garish He-Man bouncing around carefree while trashing the bad guys. Instead, he's a grizzled soldier who bears the weight of tragedy on his shoulders. Seemingly minor details like his intense stare and the individual links in his chainmail armor visually drive this point home.

It's this uncanny ability to capture the subtle nuances of the real world that amazes even Cassaday's collaborators time after time.

"I feel like a lot of artists reach for that level of detail and texture in their work, but don't penetrate," explains Rieber. "You don't always have the sense that it would hurt if someone bashed you in the head with that weathered chunk of stone, or shoved that shiny blade between your ribs, or that red liquid trickling down onto the pavement is blood. John gives you those things—that reality. That's art."

Simply put, Cassaday not only created captivating imagery that left a lasting impression, but successfully channeled the emotions all of us felt through a truly human superhuman

FEATHER IN HIS CAP John Cassaday's power-packed and poignant pencils secured him *Wizard*'s title of Best Artist of 2002.

BEST VILLAINS

Flash's Rogues Gallery

When it came time to pick the Best Villain of 2002, we ditched conventional wisdom for a Rogue alternative

No group of villains has undergone a radical overhaul like the Flash's Rogues Gallery. Over the past year, the *Flash* team of writer Geoff Johns and artist Scott Kolins have updated and amped up the Scarlet Speedster's once-anemic army of arch-nemeses, transforming them from laughable also-rans into the most lethal collection of adversaries imaginable

The Rogues, ranging in powers from the bone-crushing might of the metallic Girder to the perception-altering ability of Mirror Master to the deadly infection of Murmur's Frenzy virus, have never been as organized or driven as they were in 2002, capped off in the thrilling "Crossfire" storyarc (*Flash* #184-#188)

"It's always my conscious effort to introduce cool villains and make them interesting and threatening," explains Johns. "If you can't get into or relate to [villains] on some strange level, they can't be a real threat."

One Rogue whose threat level has skyrocketed is Captain Cold, the most popular member of Flash's Gallery with readers. Under Johns, Cold has emerged as "the Rogue among Rogues" (*Flash* #182), even working with the Scarlet Speedster during the "Crossfire" saga (although, truth be told, his motives weren't exactly pure as the driven snow)

"When Flash goes against Captain Cold, it's hard to know who to root for," notes Johns "Cold and the rest of the Rogues are just fun to watch, as long as you don't fall into the stereotype of having them arguing or being incompetent and that's why they f—ed up. Good villains know what they're doing, and they come to kick ass."

Led by a new menace called Blacksmith—who has the ability to meld organic and non-organic materials with lethal results—the Rogues began their latest scheme of revenge by dismantling the Flash's support system. One by one, Jesse Quick, Max Mercury, Cyborg and Jay Garrick (among others) were all waylaid or distracted from helping Wally West, a.k.a. the Flash, up until the moment the Rogues finally made their penultimate move—the complete subjugation of Central City!

Using an elaborate weapons' system devised by the Mirror Master, the Rogues cut off all communication with the outside world, freeing them to plunder and control the city at will, all the while enabling them to hunt down the speedster on his own turf.

Caught between an army of bloodthirsty Rogues as well as a living computer virus called the Thinker—who has enslaved all of neighboring Keystone City—the Flash can only watch when Blacksmith pulls another ace from her sleeve—a veritable army of lesser villains and thugs hidden beneath Keystone City that bolster the Rogues' ranks!

Though Flash winds up victorious by story's end, the Rogues, like the many-headed Hydra of Greek mythology, regroup to continue their blood feud against the Flash. Only this time, Weather Wizard, the Trickster and Mirror Master have a new leader—the calculating master of Absolute Zero, Captain Cold!

With Cold leading the Rogues, what are the villains' plans for 2003? Making sure the Fastest Man Alive runs himself into an early grave! ■ **ANDY SERWIN**

VILLAINY, INC. The Rogues combine their deadly talents to form a conglomerate of evil against their most-hated foe, the Flash!

BEST MINI-SERIES

League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Vol. 2

Sequels rarely live up to the original, but leave it to Alan Moore to dispel that myth.

With the triumphant return of Moore and artist Kevin O'Neill, along with the cast of characters yanked from the pages of literary classics like Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* and H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*, it soon became abundantly clear that, in terms of mini-series released in 2002, *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Vol. 2* stands, quite simply, in a league all its own.

Granted, as of press time only the first four issues of the six-issue mini-series have shipped, but that goes to show the talent of Moore and O'Neill. The first four issues enthralled us more than any complete mini-series we read all year!

League Vol. 2 takes its cue from another Wells classic, *The War of the Worlds*, and finds 19th-century England under siege by hostile aliens from Mars. With a severe lack of technology, it's soon up to Mina Murray (John Harker's ex-wife from *Dracula*), Allan Quatermain, Captain Nemo and the rest of the League to somehow find a way to halt the invasion.

In addition to a storyarc that's damn near impossible to put down, it's Moore's trademark twists that makes League the best of the best. So far, it's been uncovered that the already shady Hawley Griffin (a.k.a. the Invisible Man) has taken an "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" attitude and turned on his former teammates—even going as far as beating Murray to within inches of her life.

Meanwhile, Edward Hyde, a formerly unfeeling monster who loved nothing more than crushing the skulls of anyone who even slightly ticked him off, has started to show more of a sensitive side, as witnessed in a tender (for Hyde, at least) moment between he and Murray in issue #2.

While Moore delivers yet another incredible storyarc, O'Neill's art blends perfectly with the turn-of-the-century story. By picking up right where he left off with the original series, incorporating sharp, clean lines and heavy shadows, O'Neill's art lends a foreboding feeling to the oftentimes eerie story.

So did we jump the gun on naming *League Vol. 2* as the best mini-series? Nope, because we know what's going to happen with the rest of the series, and we can't even give any hints because it'll spoil the ending. We will say this. Once you finish Moore and O'Neill's latest opus, it'll be tough to describe it as anything less than extraordinary. ■ CS

GENTLEMEN'S WAGER We're willing to bet no other 2002 mini-series waved fans like *LoEG Vol. 2*.

BEST SINGLE ISSUE

Captain America #1

Captain America's no stranger to war Normandy, the North Atlantic, heck, even on the moon of Titan, wherever the human race was threatened, Cap served as the first and last line of defense

Despite his battle scars and countless war stories, nothing could prepare Cap for Sept. 11, 2001. And no other comic that hit stands in 2002 captured, not only what Cap was experienc ng, but what we all were going through this past year, better than *Captain America* #1.

Written by John Ney Rieber with art by John Cassaday (see page 91), *Cap* #1 opened with five chilling panels taken from inside one of the Sept. 11 hijacked planes, quickly establishing that fans weren't getting just another issue of *Cap*, but rather a telling story about that tragic day. Even the first few terrorist-spoken lines of the book were enough to send chi s down anyone's spine:

"It doesn't matter where you thought you were you're part of the bomb now."

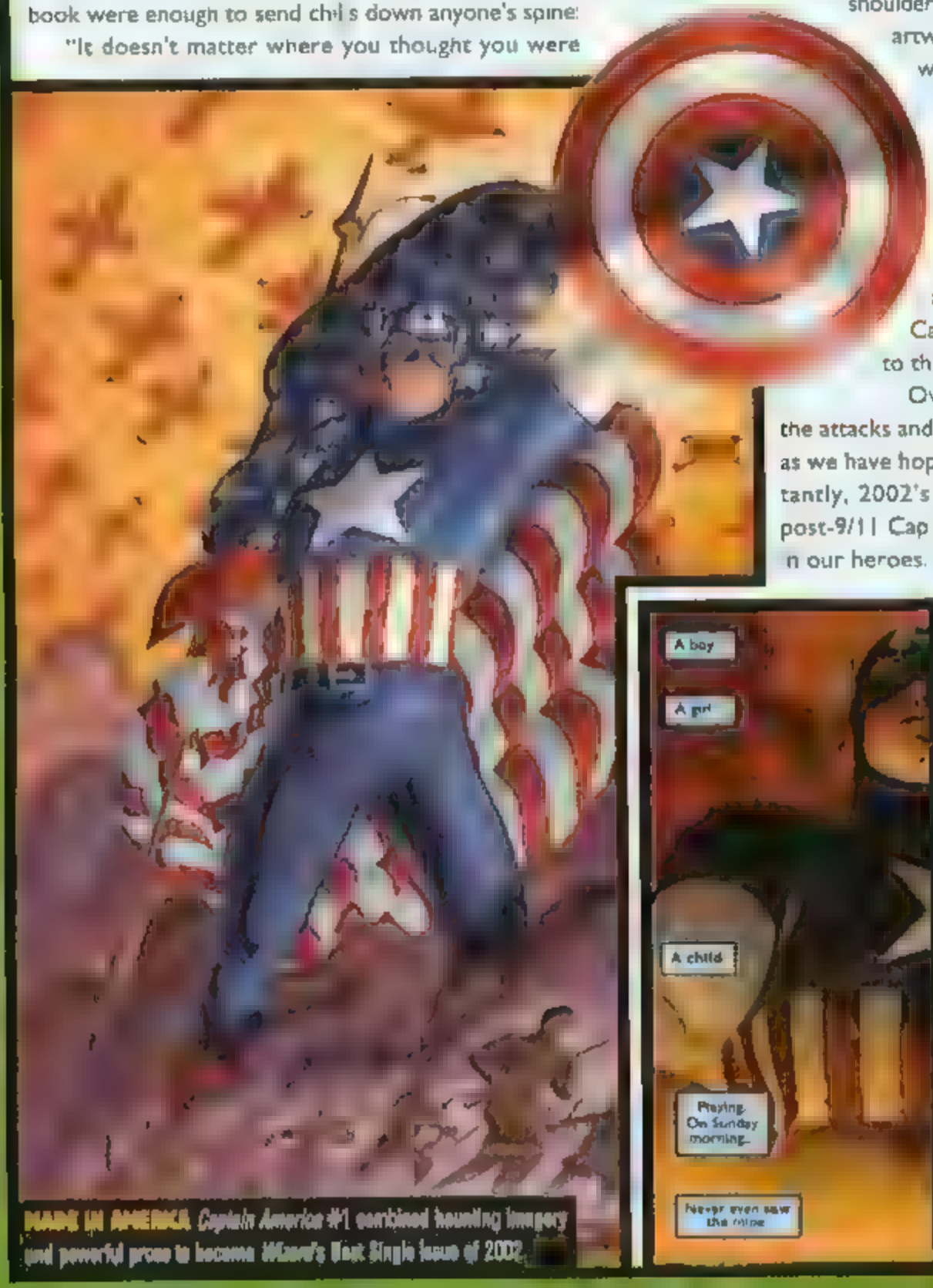
Soon thereafter, Cap, a hero who's seen his share of unnecessary bloodshed, is seen solemnly he ping with the rescue efforts, doing anything and everything he can to help in the following powerful pages. Rieber perfect y conveys that, for the first time, Cap feels useless. Even when he receives direct orders from S.H.I.E.L.D. to get his ass over to Kandahar to join in the battle against terror, Cap—searching for survivors in the World Trade Center wreckage—violently refuses, saying, "They need me. The ones who might have five minutes of breath or blood left before they die."

But Cap's bid for a better America is short-lived. The terrorist nightmare rears its head all over again, only this time in a small, midd e-America town ca led Centerville. On another a l-too-norma morning, terror strikes, this time in the form of land mines dropped over Centervil e from an airp ane. Cap seizes this opportunity to show the terrorists that he, like America, won't take this lying down, and literally jumps r ght into the m ddle of the fray

The creative duo of Rieber and Cassaday brilliantly il ustrate the sentiments of the American public post-9 11. Rieber drops inspirational tidbits throughout the book, such as, "Today, it matters that you're here. Today there's hope," in a way that makes you think Cap's sitting right next to you with his arm slung around your shoulder. Meanwhile, Cassaday delivers pages of gripping artwork that are so we l rendered, the *Wizard* staff was on the phone with his art dealer asking about prices as soon as we finished reading this issue

"I've never been a big fan of Captain America, but now I don't miss an issue," pra ses upcoming New X-Men artist Phil Jimenez. "I buy that book and just drool over it. Story aside, the thing that reall y amazes me is Cassaday's art. He's truly become a star thanks to this series."

Overall, *Captain America* #1 proved that, despite the attacks and the constant threat of more to come, as long as we have hope, the terrorists w ll never win. More importantly, 2002's Best Single ssue showed a pitch-perfect, post-9/11 Cap that left us w th pride in our hearts and faith n our heroes. ■ CS



MADE IN AMERICA *Captain America* #1 combined haunting imagery and powerful prose to become *Wizard*'s Best Single Issue of 2002.

BEST MOMENT

Matt Murdock revealed as Daredevil

Matt Murdock had finally reached a point in his turbulent life where he could almost consider it "normal."

After winning a multi-million dollar lawsuit against a poisonous candy company, he'd become a New York success story. Beautiful women in skin-tight costumes wouldn't leave him alone, he'd become respected and admired in his community—all while overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles along the way.

All that changes when Sammy Silke arrives in New York.

In Brian Michael Bendis and Alex Maleev's yearlong storyarc "Out," a new villain manages to nearly destroy Daredevil and Matt Murdock. It's not the Kingpin, Bullseye or even Stilt-Man.

It's the media.

While superhero outings were obviously the trend over at Marvel in 2002 (Steve Rogers and Tony Stark both revealed to the general public that they were Captain America and Iron Man, respectively), no other revelation packed as much of a whallop as what took place in the pages of *Daredevil*.

It all began in issue #26, when Silke, a cocky newjack from Chicago, decides to make a play for Wilson Fisk's (a.k.a. the Kingpin) territory and assets. Soon after he and several of the Kingpin's top lieutenants viciously assault the crimelord Julius Caesar-style, all of the conspirators are wiped out within weeks, save for Silke. Desperate for help, he confesses to the police, offering up the Kingpin's most prized possession as collateral—Daredevil's secret identity.

Silke spills his guts to FBI Agent Henry Driver, a poor schlub with money problems and a marriage on the rocks. Hoping to make some extra money, Driver turns around and sells the info he's just learned to *The Daily Globe*, a major New York City tabloid. Within hours, the press converge on Murdock's townhouse, and subsequently, almost destroy the Man Without Fear (Issues #31-#32).

"This is the perfect example of what Bendis does best," praises *Elektra* scribe Greg Rucka. "Everybody thinks it's his dialogue, and that's crap. It's his plotting. He tells a story the way a story is meant to be told, inevitably. Stories that, when you get to the last page, you look back and there's no other way it could've been told."

More importantly, with his most recent run on *Daredevil*, Bendis has done something that no other writer on the series from the past 15 years can claim to have accomplished—write a definitive Daredevil moment that doesn't have the name Frank Miller attached to it. Twenty years from now, comic fans will *still* be talking about DD vs. the media.

All praise goes to Bendis and Maleev—the men without fear of shaking up Daredevil's status quo. ■ CS

BLIND MAN'S BLUFF: Matt Murdock has just one strategy when the press learns he's Daredevil: deny, deny, deny!

BEST NEW CHARACTER

Milo Garret (100 Bullets)

The hottest new face in comics? Ironically, Milo Garret doesn't even have one.

While *100 Bullets* has introduced its share of impressive characters, none hold a candle to Garret, a tough-as-nails L.A.-based private investigator who likes his drinks hard, his women soft and his knuckles bloody.

After making a brief cameo in *100 Bullets* #27, Garret reappeared in issue #31 with a bang, kicking off the six-part "Counterfifth Detective" storyarc. The story begins as usual—the enigmatic Agent Graves visits Garret in the hospital, offering up the all-too-familiar attaché with a gun, 100 untraceable bullets and information on who set up the car accident that took Garret's face. But leave it to series writer Brian Azzarello (see page 90) to serve up an ending that had us gasping in disbelief.

"Counterfifth" churned out up more loops than Toucan Sam, but it's Azzarello's characterization of Garret that easily steals this show. Despite a bandage-covered face that says otherwise, Garret has colossal *cajones*, picking fights with ruffians throughout the arc. And while guns serve as judge, jury and executioner in *100 Bullets*, all Garret needs are his fists—and they speak louder than your grandfather without his hearing aid.

As "Counterfifth" unravels, it becomes clear Garret fears nothing—except for his past. When that past finally catches up to him in the form of the psychopathic killer Lono, Azzarello provides an ending so shocking that we can't divulge any details for fear of ruining it.

But Garret's mitts weren't the only ones doing the talking throughout "Counterfifth." Azzarello's hardboiled dialogue had us believing we were watching a '40s-era crime flick rather than reading a comic.

"Who I am is Milo Garret," the P.I. reveals in an inner monologue in issue #36. "I drink too much and up too little. I gotta smart mouth and the stones to back it up. I kick ass and chase tail. I got acquaintances—not friends. I like who I am. I love bein' me."

We also know who Garret is—the best new character of the year. ■ CS

FACE VALUE Best New Character Milo Garret is worth a million bucks in our eyes.

BEST GRAPHIC NOVEL

With *Selina's Big Score*, writer/artist Darwyn Cooke really lets the Cat outta her bag.

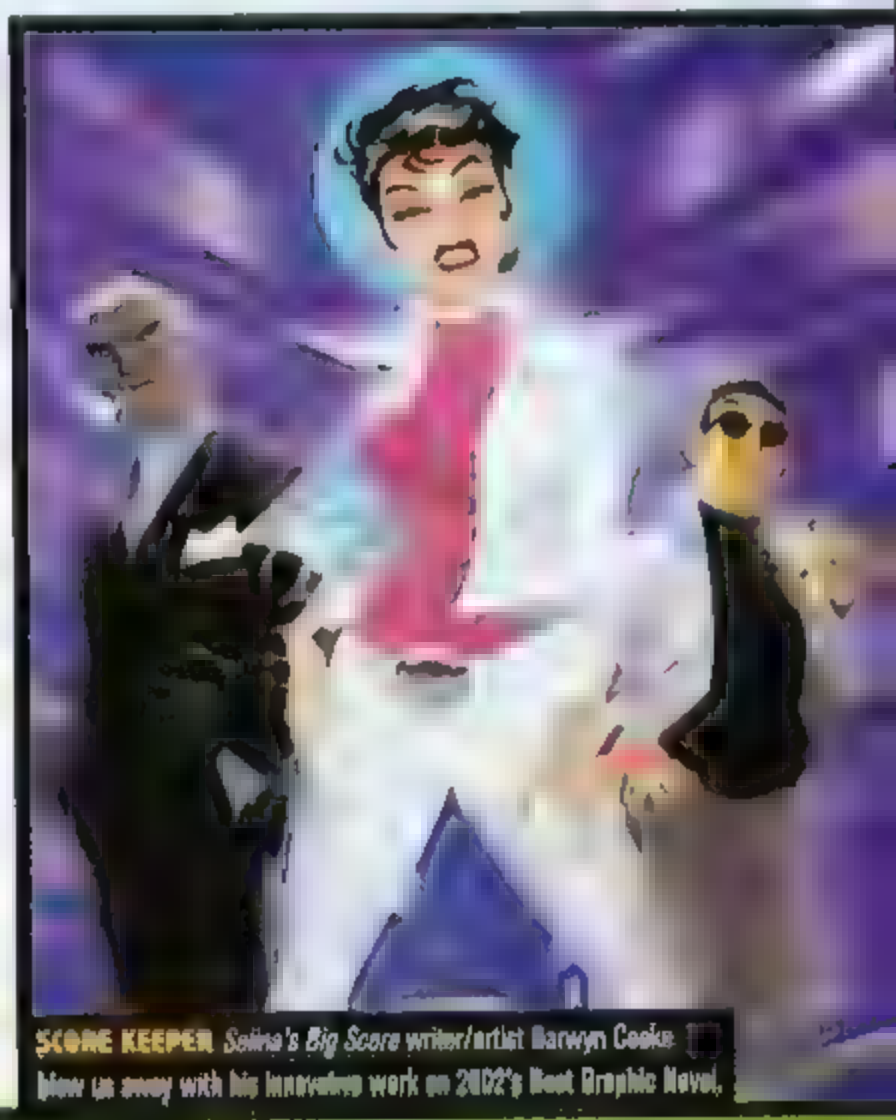
Bridging the gap between her apparent demise following 2001's "Officer Down" storyline and the relaunch of her ongoing series, *Selina's Big Score* tells the tale of how Selina Kyle, a.k.a. the Catwoman, sets herself up as the crusading urban vigilante she now works as in the pages of her own book. But living life outside the law takes big bucks, and following her exile from Gotham, Selina is strapped for cash. As the title implies, she's about to snare herself a big windfall—if she and her cohorts can survive making the withdrawal.

Selina's Big Score reads like a perfectly crafted 1950s noir crime story—don't count on seeing the Cat or the Bat in this high-octane, straight-up caper story—but the artwork and color scheme lend it the Vegasy glitz of "Ocean's 11." Throw in the clever narrative style—the story's told from the four distinct viewpoints of the main characters—and Cooke delivers comics' single greatest heist story.

"Darwyn Cooke's easy mastery of the slippery relationship between writing, drawing and storytelling is enviable, to say the least," notes *American Century* co-creator Howard Chaykin. "Any a--hole with a reputation can demand to write his own stuff, but it takes someone who understands the symbiotic relationship between writing and picture-making to actually do the job—and Darwyn gets it in spades."

With a distrusting old partner and a young hotshot in tow, Selina and Co. look to take down a train loaded with $24 million in dirty Mob money. But of course, Selina finds that her nine lives may be running out before she can swallow the proverbial canary, as private investigator Slam Bradley arrives to gum up the works.

"Working on this book, and on anything with Darwyn, was a real thrill," says *Selina* Editor Mark Chiarello. "I honestly feel Darwyn is the finest storyteller in comics, the heir to the Toth/Kurtzman/Eisner/Kirby throne!" ■ AS



SCORE KEEPER *Selina's Big Score* writer/artist Darwyn Cooke blew us away with his innovative work on 2002's Best Graphic Novel.

BEST OF THE REST

BEST INNOVATION
[illegible] library of titles.

BEST CREATOR COMEBACK
Jim Lee's return to a monthly penciling gig on *Batman*.

BEST CHARACTER COMEBACK
The Transformers.

BEST REASON TO WEAR A CUP
Ultimates #5. Captain America kicks the Hulk in the nads.

BEST "WHAT THE F—?" MOMENT
That bald guy doing himself in *The Fifth* #1.

BEST WAY TO SCAM FREE COMICS
Free Comic Book Day.

BEST SAVE
[illegible] her gynecologist!

BEST HIGH-END COLLECTIBLE
[illegible] reference, auctioned off by Heritage Comics.

BEST-SELLING "INDY" BOOK
[illegible] title goes to the *Ultimate Spider-Man Special*.

BEST COMIC UNDER 25 CENTS
Fantastic Four #60.

BEST COMIC OVER $35
[illegible]

BEST HYPED BOOK THAT NEVER ARRIVED
[illegible]

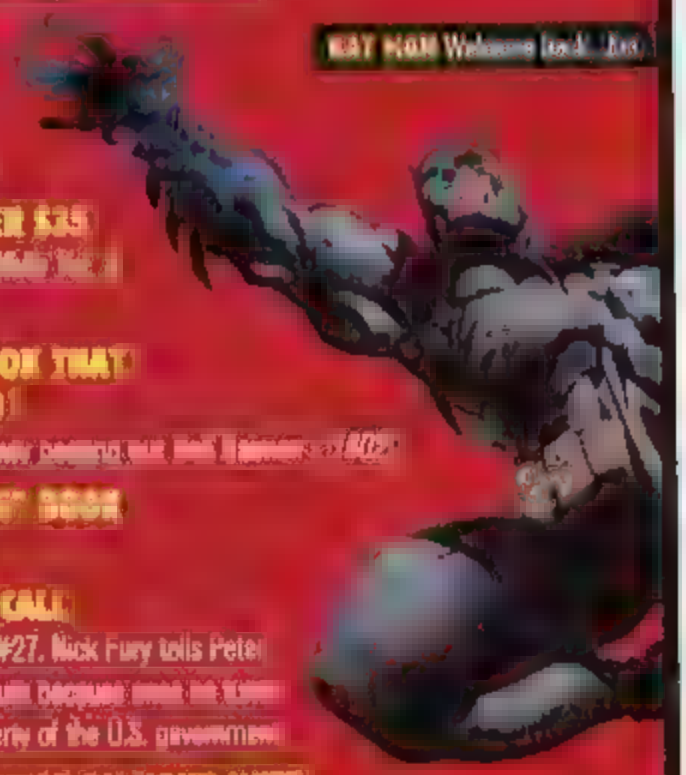
BEST "COLLECTABLE" BOOK
[illegible]

BEST WAKE-UP CALL
Ultimate Spider-Man #27. Nick Fury tells Peter [illegible] 18, he becomes property of the U.S. government.

BEST WAY TO CHEAT ON YOUR WIFE
[illegible]

HOTTEST CLOUD OF ENERGIZED PARTICLES
Venus De Milo from *X-Static*. ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

CAP KICKS HULK IN THE NADS


BAT MAN

BEST COLLECTION

Ultimate Spider-Man Hardcover

I think the "Spider-Man" DVD has the best Spidey extras? It's got nothin' on the year's "ultimate" collection!

A hardcore Spidey fan's dream come true, the *Ultimate Spider-Man Vol. 1* hardcover (an oversized, 350 page tome) not only chronicles the first year of the revamped wall-crawler by writer Brian Michael Bendis and artist Mark Bagley, but gives fans the ultimate bang for their buck with a plethora of behind-the-scenes tidbits and extras. This trade literally has it all, everything from character profiles, to deleted scenes, to pages and pages of back-and-forth e-mails between Marvel President Bill Jemas and Bendis.

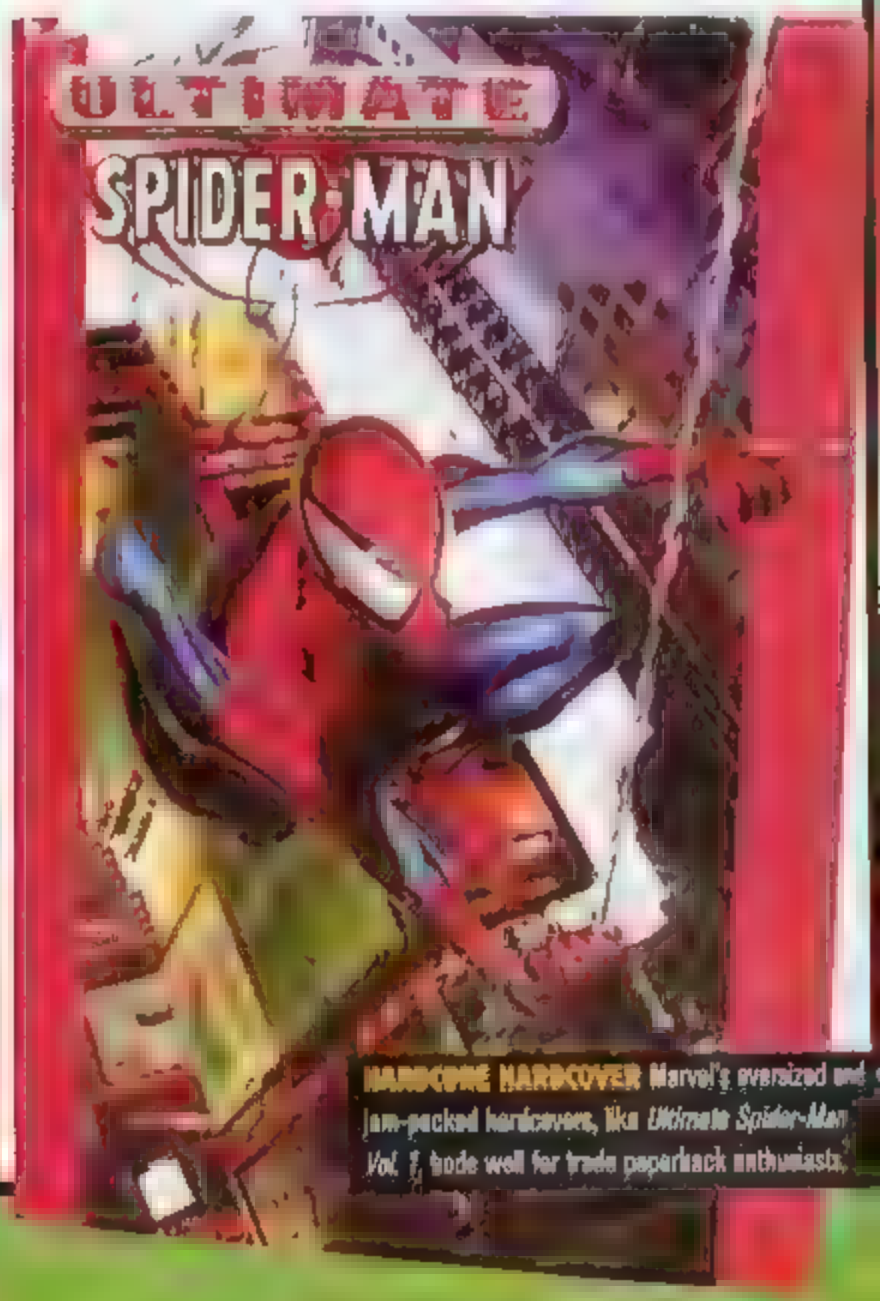
"I'm a huge fan of the double-disc DVD sets, to the point where I don't even buy them unless they're a double set," laughs Bendis. "It was actually a very interesting process and really does show people how far these things go and how much we all contributed to get this thing off the ground. Three years later, I'm still stunned by it all, so it's nice to have a record of it."

But the accolades don't stop there.

"Even without the added extras, this thing is worth every penny," says *Avengers* writer and *Ultimate Spider-Man* fan Geoff Johns. "It's nice to see comics that deserve the hardcover treatment get it. And the scope adds to the cinematic feel already instilled."

Plus, to top it all off there's a reprint of the websinger's first-ever appearance in the pages of 1962's *Amazing Fantasy* #15 by Spider-Man creators Stan Lee and Steve Ditko.

This baby is the Swiss Army Knife of trade collections! ■ JMD



HARDCORE HARDCOVER Marvel's oversized and jam-packed hardcovers, like *Ultimate Spider-Man Vol. 1*, trade well for trade paperback enthusiasts.

COMING attract

HULK SIGHTINGS!

Keep your purple pants on fanboys, as WIZARD debuts the first-ever photos from 'Hulk'

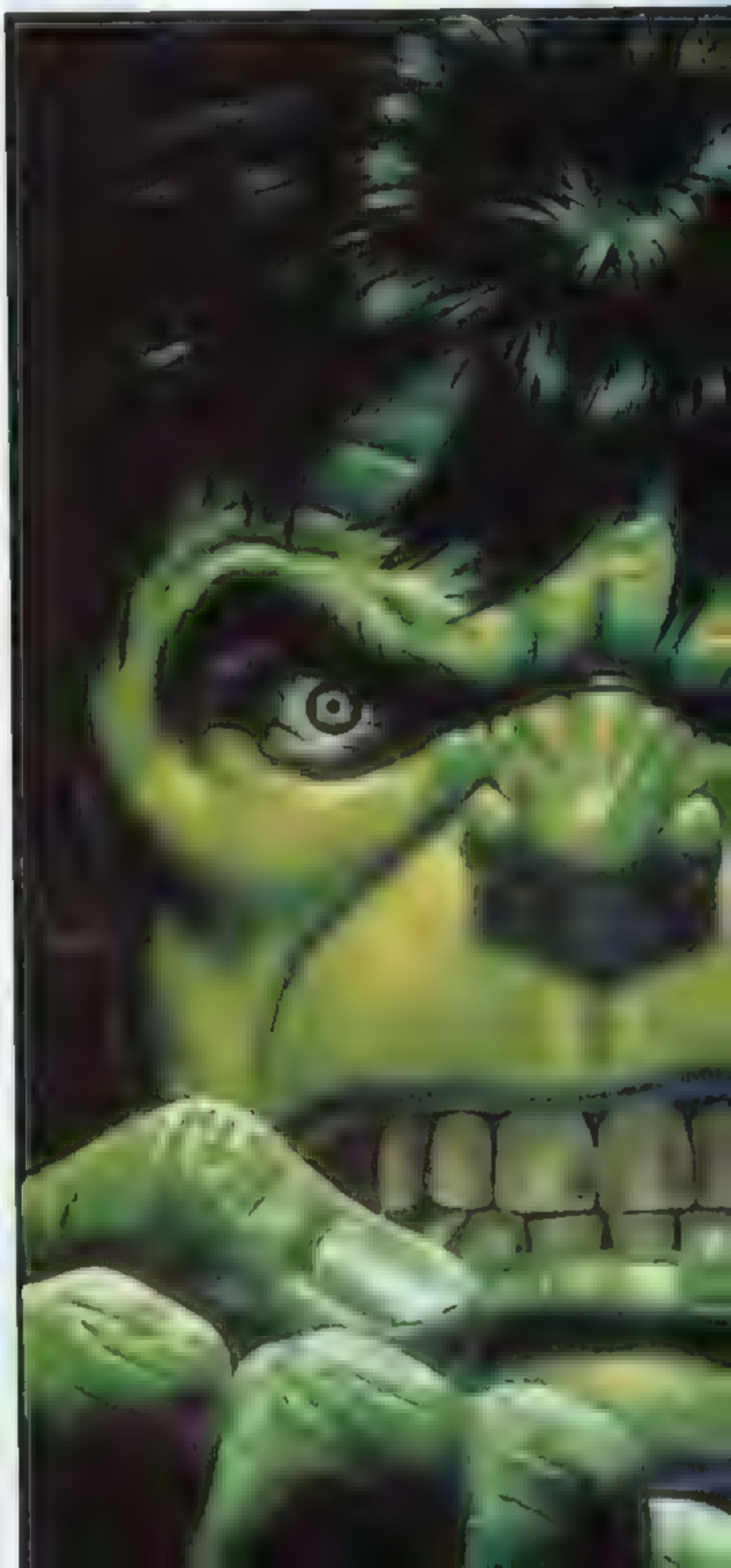
Closed movie set, huh? *Wizard* scoffs at such notions!

Director Ang Lee's "Hulk" set may have been locked down tighter than a virgin's chastity belt on prom night, but *Wizard* was able to smuggle a trio of photographs off the lot, including one pic of a battered and bruised Bruce Banner (played by Eric Bana) crashing hard after what we can only assume was a long night of Hulking out.

Lee ("Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon") is known for his intense and detail-oriented approach to making films, as you can see in these photos of the helmer directing a truckload of National Guardsmen (called in when the Hulk goes on one of his many rampages) and huddling with the crew to go over another difficult scene.

But according to Bana, Lee's operating methods will pay big dividends when Marvel Studios' and Universal Pictures' "Hulk" finally hits theaters on June 20, 2003.

"You had to work extremely hard in every facet," said Bana in one interview. "Ang's a perfectionist and he has a very determined vision. We all worked hard—not just hours, everyone works long hours, but in intensity. The level of intensity was extreme. He made me dig deep and go places that I found pretty uncomfortable. But I'm weirdly attracted to that, so that was fine by me!" ■ JOHN B. LACEY



HOLLYWOOD AND TV STUFF THAT YOU CARE ABOUT

ONS

GANG GREEN 1) Bruce Banner, played by Eric Bana, comes home wrecked after a long night of Hulking out; 2) Director Ang Lee ("Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon") and the crew studiously review a shot from the intense filming on "Hulk"; 3) Lee gives instructions to his team of "National Guardsmen" before a big, rampaging Hulk scene.

A 'TOON OF TITANIC PROPORTIONS

Cartoon Network, Kids' WB! team up for a 'Teen Titans' cartoon, slated to bow in 2003

Talk about a titanic acquisition.

Cartoon Network and the Kids' WB! have teamed up to produce a brand-new, half-hour animated series based on DC Comics' classic comic property, *Teen Titans*.

Set to debut sometime in 2003 (premiere date and airing times have yet to be scheduled), "Teen Titans" borrows heavily from the 1980s *New Teen Titans* era by writer Marv Wolfman and artist George Pérez, notably in the cast, which consists of Robin, the Boy Wonder, Cyborg, Starfire, Raven and Beast Boy (a.k.a. Changeling). However, while *New Teen Titans* often dealt with serious teen issues like drug abuse and runaways, the "Teen Titans" cartoon will have the five heroes banding together in a future era to protect Earth from intergalactic strife and interplanetary battles.

"I know they made a lot of changes, both visually and conceptually," noted Pérez. "But considering how long I've been away from the book and how many changes have been made since Marv and I worked on the series, the idea that they're giving a little tip of the hat by using the characters that Marv and I created...I'm tickled!"

Heading up production on "Teen Titans" will be Emmy Award-winning Producer Glen Murakami, who scored big successes with his work on "Justice League" and "Batman Beyond." "With the animated series being brought to life by Glen Murakami's great team, we look forward to new worlds of creative magic," said DC Comics President/Publisher Paul Levitz.

For those not familiar with the comic book versions of the young heroes who make up the Teen Titans, check out the rundowns of each character in the call-out captions below! ■ JBL

CYBORG When Vic Stone was injured in an explosion at S.T.A.R. Labs, his father replaced the ruined parts of his body with cybernetic implants, which gave him super-strength, enhanced speed and a wide variety of special weapons, including lasers, sonic disrupters and advanced computer hardware.
RAVEN The daughter of an Earth woman and an other-dimensional demon, Raven possesses vast empathic and healing powers, can travel in-between dimensions and has the ability to unleash her "soul-self," which can force an enemy to be overwhelmed by his or her worst fears.
STARFIRE Koriand'r hails from the proud warrior planet of Tamaran, where all of her race can convert solar energy into flight. But when she was kidnapped by the evil Psions, their experiments granted her the ability to store untold amounts of energy and unleash devastating blasts!
BEAST BOY After undergoing an experimental medical treatment to save his life, Gar Logan (also known as the Changeling in the comic series) gained the ability to transform his physical structure into any animal he could imagine.
ROBIN, THE BOY WONDER Batman's trusted partner and ward, Robin acts as the Teen Titans' leader, utilizing his superb technical training, computer skills and high-flying acrobatics to reach the heights of human potential.

TRAILERS...

SMITH

KEVIN SMITH For those of you looking to place a few profanity-laced trades under the Christmas tree this year, nothing satisfies like "An Evening with Kevin Smith." The DVD release from Columbia Home Video features Smith's hilarious and insightful college speeches and tips the scales at nearly four hours for $27.95. Look for it in stores on Dec. 17.

'SUPERMAN' Director Brett Ratner ("Red Dragon") isn't spilling any details about the "Superman" script he's set to bring to the big screen, but he's defending it with his last breath from the rumor-mongers whose early reviews of an Internet-circulated script was the death-knell for the Superman franchise. "When I read this script, I said I've got to do this movie," Ratner told E! Online. "It's got heart, it's got soul, it's got emotion. It's awesome."

Days later, *Entertainment Weekly* quoted the helmer as saying, "The script I'm shooting has none of that stuff," in reference to rumors that one treatment featured a gay Jimmy Olsen, Lex Luthor as an alien and Superman dying to be reborn even more powerful than ever

PATRICK STEWART IN 'X-MEN'

'X-MEN 1.5 SPECIAL EDITION' Fox Home Entertainment has scheduled a Feb. 11, 2003 release for the "X-Men 1.5 Collector's Edition DVD." The Special Edition is a two-disc release, with Disc 1 featuring a new introduction scene, 24 deleted scenes and commentary by director Bryan Singer, Ian McKellen (Magneto) and Patrick Stewart (Prof. Xavier). Disc 2 includes another intro by Singer, loads of promo items, an "X-Men 2" teaser trailer, a short "Behind the Scenes of 'X-Men 2' and five featurettes on the making of "X-Men."

'X-MEN: EVOLUTION' The first DVD edition of the hit Kids' WB! cartoon "X-Men: Evolution" is scheduled for Spring 2003, timed to be in stores before "X-Men 2" hits theaters on May 3. The DVD will contain the first five episodes from the second season of the show, which introduced the New Mutants and featured the first appearances of Beast and Arcade.

'STARMAN' According to published reports, ABC has ordered a script treatment from Tollin/Robbins Productions ("Smallville," "Birds of Prey") and Warner Bros. Television based on the DC Comics property, *Starman*. *Starman* tells the story of a 20-something slacker named Jack Knight who's forced to adopt the mantle of Starman in the fictional Opal City when his older brother is killed in the line of duty. John Gatins ("Hardball") is writing the script for the show and will also act as executive producer with Tollin/Robbins' Joe Davola, Mike Tollin and Brian Robbins. There has been no casting as of yet, and it's unclear what, if any, involvement *Starman* creators James Robinson and Tony Harris will have in the show's development.

'SPIDER-MAN' DVD If you want to check out a hilarious Easter egg on Sony's "Spider-Man" DVD, try this: Put in the first disc, the one with the actual film. Click on "Commentaries," then click on the picture of Harry Osborn (James Franco) to access a new menu called "CGI Bloopers & Gag Reel." There's a trio of sidesplitting clips that feature CGI tests of Spidey's superpowers...in ways you'd never expect

SHORT TAKES Looking to cash in on the "Daredevil" movie, Disney will release a third animated Spider-Man DVD called "Spider-Man vs. Daredevil" on Feb. 18, just four days after "Daredevil" hits theaters. Included on the DVD, which retails for $19.95, will be the "Man Without Fear" episode of the Spider-Man cartoon in which Daredevil appeared...Music video director Francis Lawrence is reportedly in talks to make his feature film debut as the helmer on "Constantine," based on the Vertigo/DC Comics title *Hellblazer*. The film has Keanu Reeves attached in the title role of John Constantine, a mystical cad and conman...MTV has cast a couple of celebrity guest stars for its upcoming animated "Spider-Man" cartoon, including rocker Rob Zombie as the Lizard, hip-hopper Eve as the Black Cat and Ethan Embry ("Sweet Home Alabama") as Electro. There's also rumors that Michael Clarke Duncan ("Daredevil") will give voice to the Kingpin for the cartoon, and that "Buffy" star James Marsters (Spike) will lend his talents to an unspecified character as well.

■ THE WIZARD STAFF

SPIDER-MAN

stuff

COMIC BOOK MERCHANDISE YOU CAN BUY...

By Dave Marshall and the *Wizard* Staff

AHHHH! AHHHHH! I CAN'T FEEL MY LEGS!! OH, WAIT

YO! Are you a company who sells stuff cool enough to make the grade here? Let us be the judges of that. Send any info/samples to: Stuff for "Stuff," c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Avenue, Congers, NY 10920-2064. And check your local stores for availability of all these products, or ask you retailer to order 'em for you!

MARVEL'S DIAMONDS

Forget about precious gems: these new busts and statues from Diamond Select are where the real value lies. Whether you're a fan of the Silver Age or the white-hot Ultimate Universe, this selection of Marvel heroes offers something for everyone. But be warned: All have limited runs, so none of these are gonna stick around for long.

ULTIMATE CAPTAIN AMERICA BUST
Reg. ed. $50, (Dec. 2002)

$75 (Jan. 2003)

IRON MAN STATUE $75 (Dec. 2002)

HEY ANGEL... NICE COSTUM WHITEBREAD

CAUTION: ROADBLOCK AHEAD!

Don't try running this Roadblock; he's liable to open a can of .50 cal on your behind and laugh while he's perforating you! Roadblock, the heavy machine gun specialist from the G.I. Joe team, comes to life as a mini-bust courtesy of Palisades Toys in December. Measuring 6" tall, this ultra-detailed mini-bust is the fourth piece in the G.I. Joe line and will be strictly limited, so be sure to plunk down your $45 before Roadblock gets discharged.

MARVEL GETS A-HEAD

Marvel maniacs rejoice—Dynamic Forces (**www.dynamicforces.com**) busts out disembodied versions of your favorite Marvel characters this December and January. Be prepared to lay down a pretty penny for these babies, even if they don't have all their limbs. And anyone thinking that missing appendages make these sculpts anything less than super-cool better take a closer look before Thor finds his arms and whups you good!

I COULD SWEAR I HAD SOME SLIM JIMS LEFT...
UGH ..THOSE SLIM JIMS AIN'T S TTIN' TOO WELL...
$89.99 (Jan. 2003)
$89.99 (Jan. 2003)
$89.99 (Jan. 2003)
$255 (Dec. 2002)

HOTSTUFF!!!

BEAUTY AND THE BATH

Katchoo—with a drink in one hand and a gun in the other—likes it wet and wild, and so do the fans, as evidenced by the popularity of this new piece from Moore Creations (**www.mooreaction.com**), based on Terry Moore's independent fan-fave title, *Strangers in Paradise*. Detail-obsessed Clayburn Moore has done it again, sculpting bubbles so delicate you can almost see them pop. Coming to a store near you this January, get ready to pay $59 for the pleasure of wondering where Katchoo hid the rubber ducky (But we're guessing Francine knows the answer!)

stuff

PUT A BOWEN IN YOUR HOLIDAY STOCKING

Bowen Designs does the holiday season right, with five new mini-busts hitting in time for the busy shopping season (and we're putting *all* of 'em on our gift lists!). All six of theses pieces—Black Cat, Medusa, two Nick Furys and two Yellowjackets—hit in December, they'll retail for $45 each, and Randy Bowen sculpted each of them. So what's not to love? You can even go online to order them from the Bowen Website at **www.bowendesigns.com**.

BUSTIN' OUT THE FORCE

Light side and dark side alike, there is't a goober in the galaxy that wouldn't be impressed by these new Star Wars busts from Dark Horse (**www.darkhorse.com**) and Gentle Giant Studios, which are available now! "Three-dimensionally scanned" from original Star Wars props and costumes, these two sculptures are the next best thing to actually having Darth Vader and Yoda over for tea. Add them to your personal hive of scum and villainy for $50 and $45, respectively

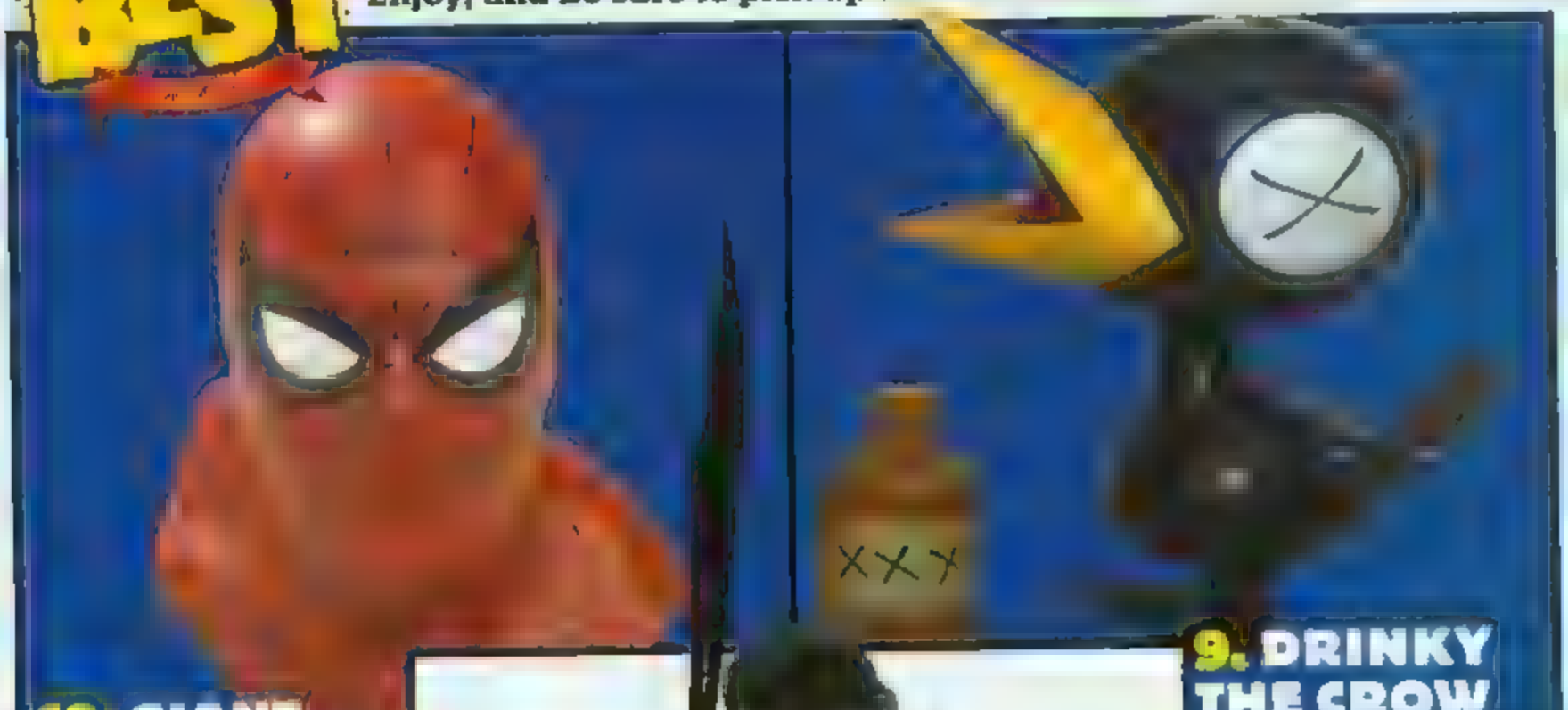
*THE VIEWS OF COLONEL NICHOLAS FURY ARE NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF WIZARD ENTERTAINMENT

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Beggin' for some action? Well fret no more, 'cause DC Direct has action figures galore bursting onto the scene this March, including a Birds of Prey three-pack with Black Canary, Oracle and Huntress, shipping (March 5) and three new Superman figures (March 19). Featuring some of DC's toughest guys and gals, every one of these figures boasts oodles of articulation for maximum posability and bases to keep them standing in even the most contorted positions. Be sure to snatch these up before they fly away, and remember—retailers will determine prices!

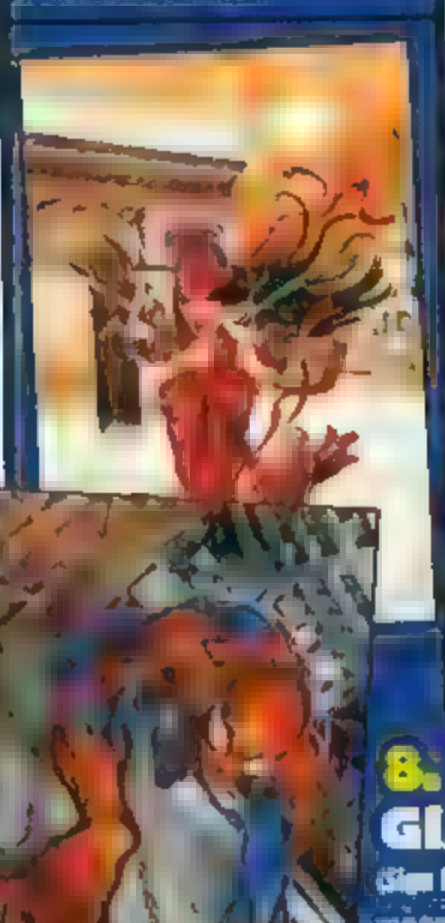
BEST OF THE BEST

Teaming up with the best mathematicians we could find (i.e., the Calculus Club of Nyack High School), Wizard constructed a complex formula to calculate the Best Stuff of 2002, taking into account collectability, coolness, fan feedback and pure whimsy. Enjoy, and be sure to pick up this fine "Stuff" in time for the holidays!



10. GIANT SPIDER-MAN BUST (Dynamic Forces)

It's 1½ inches of massive Spider-Man goodness, and it was designed by *über*-painter Alex Ross! In a year where Spidey ruled, this is a must-have item for wall-crawler fans.

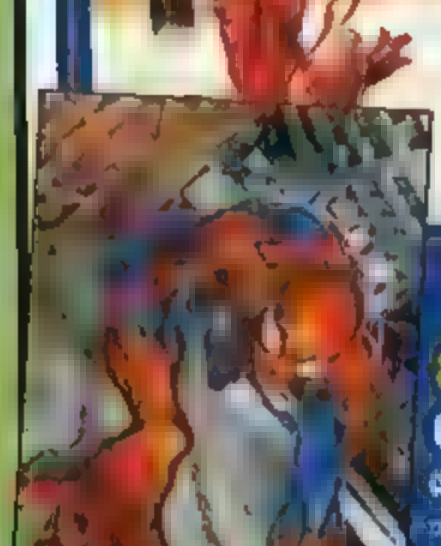


9. DRINKY THE CROW

(Dark Horse) Tony Millionaire's *Sock Monkey* got a new cast member, but he's too spoused to celebrate. Check out the Drinky the Crow PVC figure, which includes a jug of moonshine and X'ed out eyes to show off his inebriation. Don't drink and fly, Drinky!

8. SIGN POINT GIANT MURALS

(Sign Point) This company produces massive murals and wallpaper featuring a bevy of Marvel images, including Spider-Man, Elektra, Captain America, the Avengers, the Fantastic Four, the X-Men and the Incredible Hulk. If it's your fanboy dream to paper your entire house with comic characters, Sign Point (www.ultimatewalls.com) can fulfill it.



7. LIZARD BUST

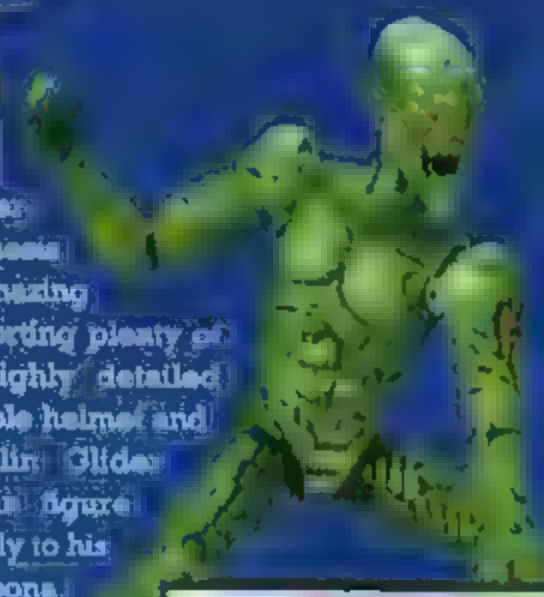
(Diamond Select) The lethal Lizard never looked so good, and one of Spidey's deadliest enemies finally appears as the true bloodthirsty predator. Diamond Select's line of Spider-Man villains—and this one in particular—rocks, thanks to the fine work of the Art Asylum sculptors.

6. SNAKE-EYES BUST (Palisades Toys)

G.I. Joe fever's been running rampant thanks to the comic relaunch, but Palisades gets into the battle with its beautifully sculpted, ultra-detailed Snake Eyes bust, the first in its Joe line so far—and also the best.

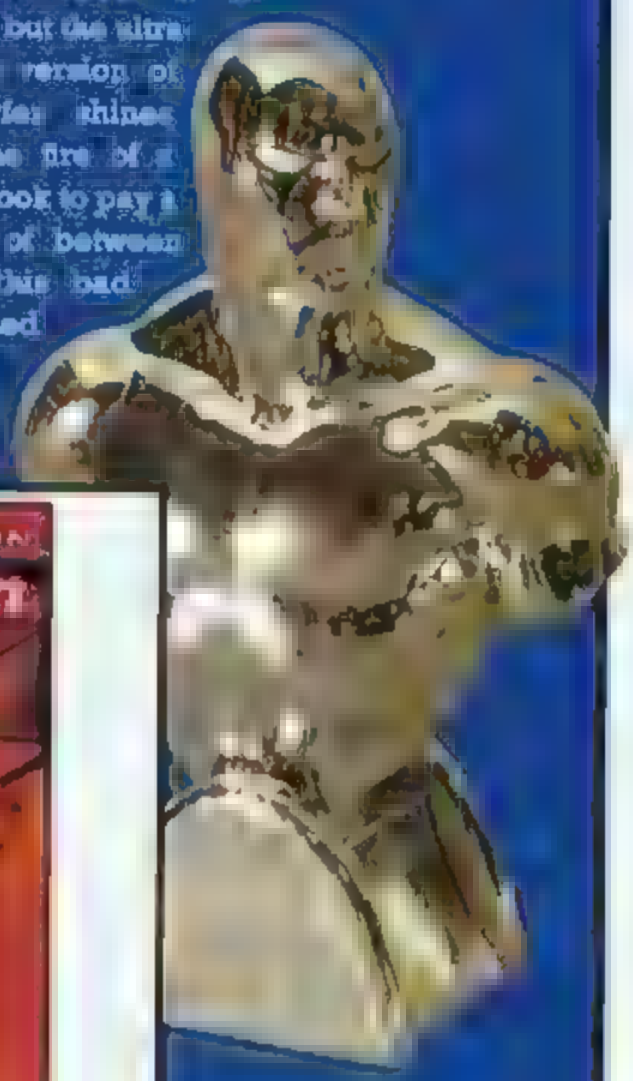
5. MOVIE GREEN GOBLIN FIGURE

(Toy Biz) Spider-Man's movie nemesis makes for an amazing action figure! Sporting plenty of articulation, a highly detailed sculpt, a removable helmet and a kick-ass Goblin Glider base, this Goblin figure measures up nicely to his silver screen persona.



4. CHROMIUM SILVER SURFER BUST

(Bowen Designs) We knock on the original version, but the ultra-rare Chromium version of the Silver Surfer shines brighter than the fire of a thousand suns! Look to pay a premium price of between $300-$500 for this bad boy, which retailed initially for $45.

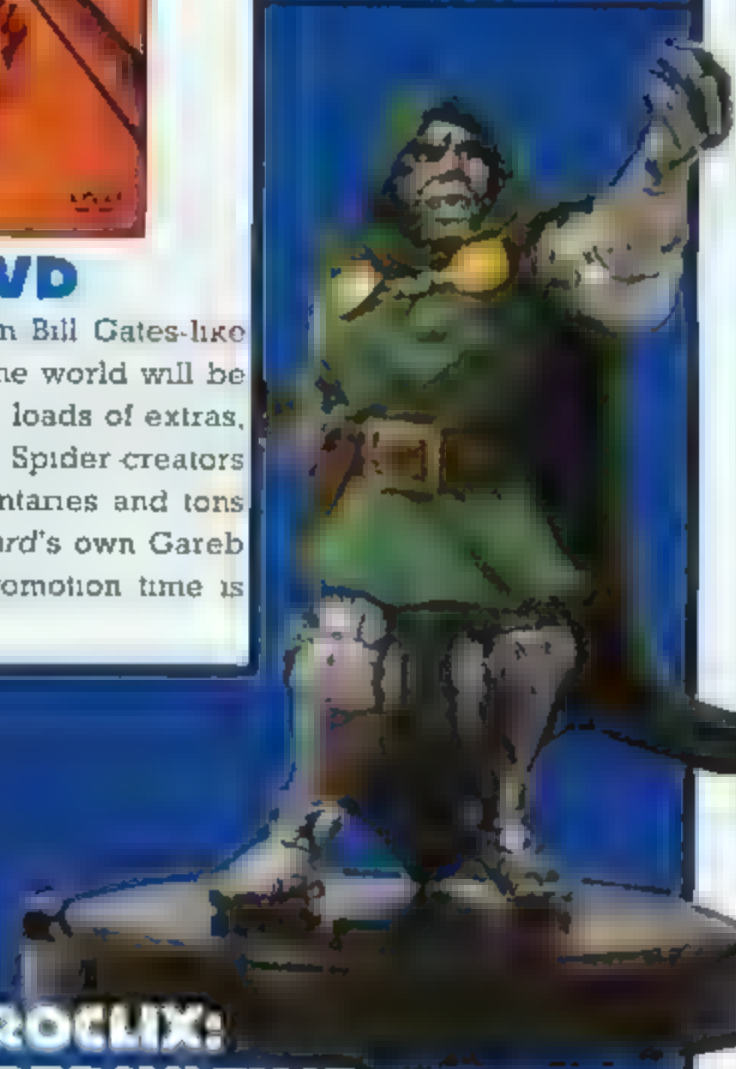


1. 'SPIDER-MAN' DVD

(Sony Entertainment) "Spider Man" raked in Bill Gates-like money this year and every fanboy in the world will be snapping up the kick-ass DVD! Look for loads of extras, including art galleries, interviews with Spider-creators past and present, 'Making of' documentaries and tons more. There's even a sitdown with *Wizard*'s own Gareb Shamus and Brian Cunningham (self promotion time is now officially over). ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

3. MARVEL LEGENDS' THING FIGURE

(Toy Biz) The Legends line of figures from Toy Biz have to be the coolest looking, most articulate toys ever created, but our favorite has to be the ever-lovin' Thing. Sporting massive muscles, a rocky hide and a menacing scowl, someone's getting beat down when Ben Grimm comes to town!



2. HEROCLIX: CLOBBERIN' TIME (WizKids)

As good as the first Marvel *HeroClix: Infinity Challenge* is, WizKids improves on the game with its second version, *Clobberin' Time*. The rules and stats are way more fun to play, and you've got a ton of awesome characters like the Fantastic Four, Dr. Doom and Hawkeye.

MARVEL'S GAME PLAN

Upcoming movies spawn a host of new games

With "Daredevil," "Hulk" and "X Men 2" all poised to be the next big comic inspired blockbuster, video game publishers are chomping at the bit in an effort to woo superhero-hungry gamers to their small screen adaptations. Developers are working closely with moviemakers in order to ensure these games satisfy fans' appetites long after they've left the movie theatre.

DAREDEVIL

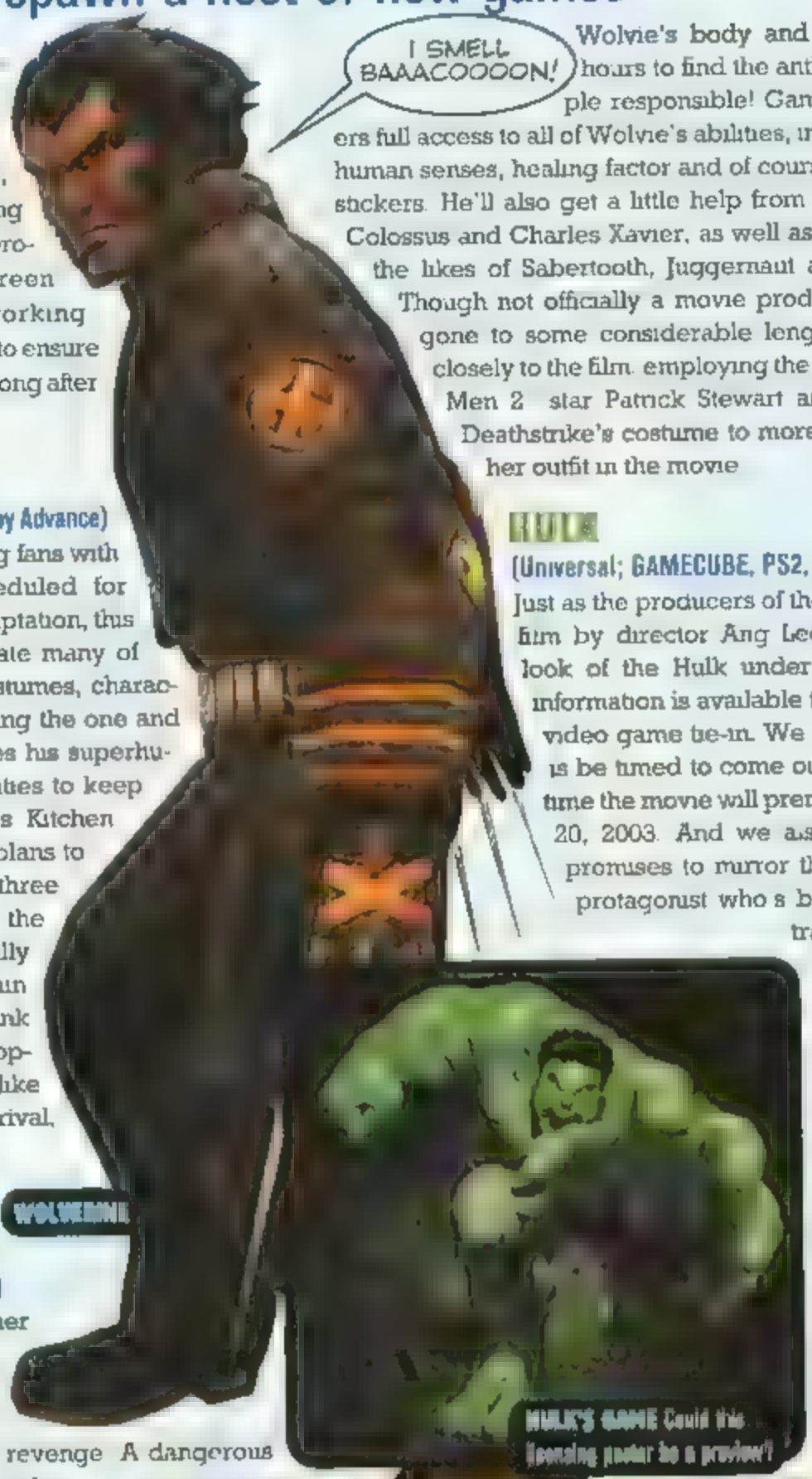
(Encore; GAMECUBE, PS2, Xbox, Game Boy Advance)

First off, Encore plans on satisfying fans with a GBA Daredevil release scheduled for February. While not an official adaptation, this action side-scroller will incorporate many of the film's elements, including costumes, characters and settings, all while following the one and only Man Without Fear as he uses his superhuman senses and martial arts abilities to keep the streets of New York's Hell's Kitchen clean. Later, in fall 2003, Encore plans to release a Daredevil game for all three next-gen systems just in time for the film's release on DVD. This fully realized 3-D adventure will remain true to the spirit of the classic Frank Miller material and feature DD mopping up the streets with villains like Kingpin, The Hand and his archrival, Bullseye.

X-MEN: WOLVERINE'S REVENGE

(Activision, GAMECUBE, PS2, Xbox, GBA)

Boasting a script written by former *Wolverine* scribe Larry Hama, this 3-D action adventure out in April has the Canadian mutant on a search-and-destroy mission of revenge. A dangerous X-virus has been activated within Wolvie's body and he's only got 48 hours to find the antidote and the people responsible! Gameplay gives players full access to all of Wolvie's abilities, including his superhuman senses, healing factor and of course, those nasty pig stickers. He'll also get a little help from friends like Beast, Colossus and Charles Xavier, as well as go toe to toe with the likes of Sabertooth, Juggernaut and the Wendigo! Though not officially a movie product, Activision has gone to some considerable lengths to tie the title closely to the film, employing the voice talents of 'X Men 2' star Patrick Stewart and tweaking Lady Deathstrike's costume to more closely resemble her outfit in the movie.



HULK'S GAME Could this licensing poster be a preview?

HULK

(Universal; GAMECUBE, PS2, Xbox, GBA)

Just as the producers of the Universal Studios film by director Ang Lee are keeping the look of the Hulk under wraps, not much information is available thus early about the video game tie-in. We do know the game is be timed to come out around the same time the movie will premiere, which is June 20, 2003. And we also know the game promises to mirror the film, featuring a protagonist who's both superhero and tragic monster. Gamers can also expect to take the Jade Giant on the road with a GBA version. Universal is confident that if all goes well, Hulk could actually become their next big franchise, similar to the way Spider-Man has become a gold mine for Activision.

■ JAMES McDONOUGH

SNEAK PEEK

Whoa, true believers! Talk about coming out of left field, Activision recently announced the formidable Iron Man is coming to the Game Boy Advance in late December. Here's a sneak peek of some of the screenshots from of Shellhead's GBA debut that caught us—and everyone else—off guard.

WISHFUL THINKING

Some ideas for Marvel's online game

Recently, software developer/publisher Vivendi Universal announced their agreement with Marvel Comics to produce massively multiplayer online (MMO) games based on the entire Marvel Universe, which contains upwards of 4,700 characters. Similar to the wildly successful *EverQuest* series, the project will allow players from all over the world to interact within a virtual Marvel Universe via online interface.

Unfortunately, fans will have to wait some time—the first game isn't scheduled until 2005. In the meantime, we drew up a wish list of some of the fanboy goodness we'd love to see incorporated into this ambitious project.

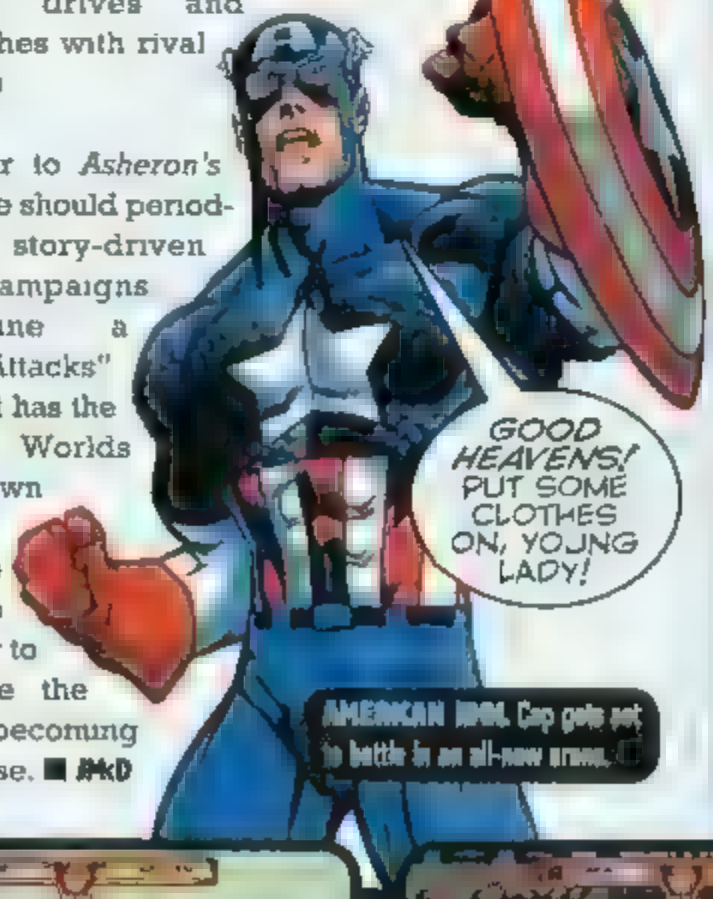
LOCALES Make sure to include warps to classic Marvel locales such as Dr. Doom's hometown of Latveria, the Jurassic park known as the Savage Land, and of course, Marvel's Manhattan.

DETAILS How about J. Jonah Jameson on a *Daily Bugle* billboard berating Spidey, or ads for Xavier's Institute, the Quinjet, Fantasticar—even the Vulture cruising around the skyline of Marvel Manhattan.

NON-PLAYABLE CHARACTERS We'd need denizens of the Marvel Universe to react to all the hullabaloo that our heroes and villains are causing. Include some *Sims*-style civilians to protest mutants, run scared from the villains or cheer on "face" heroes like the Avengers.

RIVALRIES With a universe so deep, rivalries are sure to develop. Let gamers form their own versions of the Avengers, Defenders, etc., allowing them to create their own membership drives and grudge matches with rival super-squads.

EVENTS Similar to *Asheron's Call*, this game should periodically have story-driven crossover campaigns. Just imagine a "Galactus Attacks" campaign that has the Devourer of Worlds chowing down on the Earth. It'll now be up to players to band together to try and save the world from becoming the main course. ■ JMcD



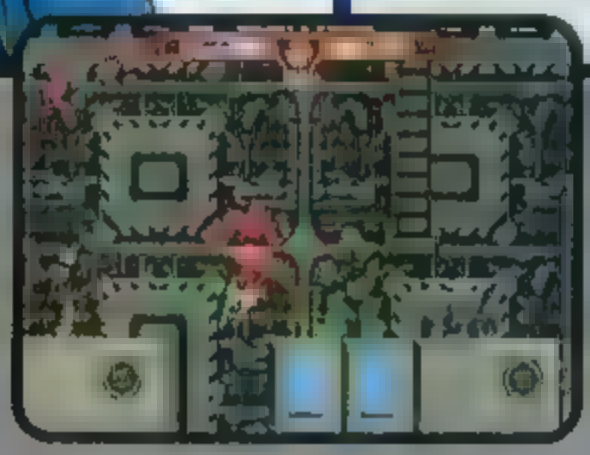
videorumblings

VICE IS NICE The retro trend is "transforming." Not only are developers bringing back their most popular franchises from the 1980s, but also games like Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* are putting an '80s spin to its most popular franchises. Taking a nod from the classic TV series "Miami Vice," the latest installment in the incredibly popular carjacking series takes place in Miami, Fla. circa 1986, featuring all the fast cars, snazzy threads and even the music that made the era so unforgettable.

DARK DELAY It looks like the Dark Knight won't be returning to consoles this fall in the highly anticipated *Batman: Dark Tomorrow*. In order to fine tune gameplay and graphics, the game's developer, Kemco, has opted to push back the title release date to sometime first quarter 2003. However, the title will now come packaged with the second part of a limited-edition, two-part Batman comic by Scott Peterson and Rick Burchett that will serve as a prequel to the storyline in the game. The first part will be available as a pack-in with platform-specific mags.

PRIMAL URGE U.K.-based publishers Com.X will publish a comic book adaptation of the upcoming Sony game, *Primal* (PS2). The book will feature an artistic collaboration between Joshua Middleton (*Sky Between Branches*) and Ben Oliver (*Puncture*). *Puncture* scribe Russell Uttley is slated to write. The comic will reportedly appear first as an insert in European gaming magazines, and then eventually may see a print run of over 500,000!

GUILTY PLEASURES Sammy Studios will finally be releasing its short "Guilty Gear" movie stateside this winter. The short film was featured as an extra on the Japanese DVD release *Guilty Gear XX*. The U.S. version, *Guilty Gear X2*, which is a hack-and-slash fighting game featuring unique sci-fi characters that battle using everything from anchors to supernatural symbiotes, debuts early 2003. ■ JMcD



games we wanna see

THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN

THE BOOK The crown jewel of the ABC line, Alan Moore's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* breathes new life into some of 19th century Great Britain's most endearing literary characters. Mina Murray, Captain Nemo, Allan Quatermain, Dr. Jeckyll/Mr. Hyde and the Invisible Man unite to thwart the evil mad nations of dreaded scoundrels like Moriarty and Fu Manchu.

THE GAME The ideal *LOEG* game would be a story centric/thinking man's game, similar to Nintendo/Silicon Knight's modern-day classic *Eternal Darkness*. Following in those footsteps, gameplay would feature separate episodes tailor made for each League member, capitalizing on their strengths and backgrounds. And what better basis for the League's first game than the original *LOEG* mini-series? Taking this a step further, the mechanics for each scenario would alter from character to character. A "Dr. Jekyll" scenario, which takes a nod from *Eternal Darkness*' sanity meter, has the good doctor prowling an opium bar, forced to keep his wits in check, lest he reveal his location to Fu Manchu's thugs by transforming into the monstrous Mr. Hyde. Or what about a level with Mina Murray navigating the dangerous alleys of Cairo in search of an ailing Allan Quatermain? And whether it's coming to the rescue in the *Nautilus*, or blasting scurvy dogs with a harpoon cannon, action fiends can get their fix with Dr. Nemo.

JUST IMAGINE Undercover as a lady of the night, Mina Murray searches the seedy streets of Paris for clues that may lead her to the beastly murderer who prowls after dark. However, she's soon in over her head and it's up to Quatermain to rescue our damsel in distress. But will he also need rescuing? And similar to the bonus collector comics in *Spider-Man*, hardcore gamers could try and locate the various *LOEG*-style ads hidden in each stage.

REALITY BYTE Not bloody likely! With its niche audience and the movie in limbo, we wouldn't count on it. Too bad, because for some gamers, a *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* title would be just their cup of tea. ■ JMcD

BEST OF 2002

Kudos to this year's winners

GAME OF THE YEAR Super Mario Sunshine (Nintendo; GAMECUBE)
Satisfying the Super Mario drought, Nintendo's plumber paisan is back! With the addition of his water pack, his latest adventure made quite the splash.

BEST COMIC BOOK GAME
Superman: Shadow of Apokolips (Infogrames; PS2)
When we picked up our controllers we were as giddy as schoolgirls. Flying through Metropolis, seeing through walls and pinpointing crooks with our heat vision was just too much.

BEST HERO Hotsuma, Shinobi (Sega; PS2)
Move over Spidey! The coolest superhero in video games is the badass Hotsuma. This supernunja has got the martial arts moves to take down legions of evildoers and look cool, too!

BEST VILLAIN The Green Goblin, Spider-Man: The Movie (Activision; GAMECUBE, PS2, Xbox)
Willem Dafoe pulled out all the stops to bring this over-the-top baddie to life on the big screen and Activision used the same magic for his small-screen counterpart.

BEST SIDEKICKS
Goofy and Donald Duck, Kingdom Hearts (Square; PS2)
Admittedly, we winced when we first heard this Disney duo would star in Square's latest epic. But *KH* proved us wrong showing just how cool these characters can be.

BEST STORY Eternal Darkness (Nintendo; GAMECUBE)
Boasting a horrific tale that weaves together an unlikely cast of characters, this story of humanity's endless battle against evil would make H.P. Lovecraft envious.

BEST SOUNDTRACK/MUSIC
Robotech: Battlecry (TDK Mediactive; GAMECUBE, PS2, Xbox)
Kicking it old school, TDK shifted into fifth gear to provide fans with the classic voices, theme music and sound effects for the ultimate Robotech experience.

BEST EASTER EGG Play as the Green Goblin, Spider-Man: The Movie (Activision; GAMECUBE, PS2, Xbox)
What could be cooler than slinging webs as your friendly neighborhood Spider Man? How about flying the Goblin Glider as the Webhead's arch-nemesis?

BEST MULTIPLAYER GAME Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee (Infogrames; GAMECUBE)
Few things are as socially rewarding as hanging out with your friends and trashing the Tokyo skyline with 400-foot-tall mutants and robots. ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

manga MANIA!

COOL JAPANESE COMIC & ANIMATION NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW...

X-MEN TURN JAPANESE!

Marvel's mutants to be drawn by import artist in Mangaverse follow-up

They may look and act a little different, but at their core, they're still the X Men.

Following the completion of *Spider-Man: Legend of the Spider Clan*, Marvel will launch their next Mangaverse mini-series, *X-Men: Ronin*, debuting in March. The story picks up from the end of *X Men: Equinox*, one of the six one-shots put out last January.

Written by J. Torres (*X Men Unlimited*) and penciled by Makoto Nakatsuka (*Star Wars Tales*), *Ronin* stars the manga-influenced versions of Wolverine (a samurai and the leader of the group who's missing a hand due to a child hood fight with Cyclops), Cyclops (literally missing one eye due to the same fight), Storm (a younger and hipper weather witch) and Jean Grey (a rebellious upstart still learning how to use her powers) They'll cross paths with the Hellfire Club, an international organization of evil mutants whose local chapter counts the White Queen and Tessa Sage as members.

BEASTS OF THE EAST Manga versions of Wolverine, Storm and Cyclops return.

"In *Equinox*, the X-Men established themselves as heroes of the people," explains Torres. "But the tide turns against them in *Ronin*." Also, it turns out the White Queen is getting help from some unlikely sources, including Charles Xavier!

"By the same token," continues the Toronto-based writer, "the X-Men get a hand from someone who's a villain in [regular] X-Men lore." Fans can also expect appearances from manga-tized versions of Pyro, Forge, Iceman and others, including an undisclosed member of Alpha Flight.

"*Legend of the Spider-Clan* followed up and expanded on Spider-Man's role in the Mangaverse," notes editor C.B. Cebulski, who wrote *X Men: Equinox* and co-designed the characters with artist Jeff Matsuda. "*Ronin* will do the same for our merry band of mutants.

"Additionally, [this] will be the first time an actual Japanese manga artist will be involved, taking the series to a whole new level and helping the [Mangaverse] live up to its 'manga' billing!"

To say the artist, 30-year-old Tokyo-based Makoto Nakatsuka, is excited to work on characters he's adored for a long time, especially Wolverine, is an understatement

"The Japanese translated version of *Wolverine: Weapon X* was impressive," Nakatsuka raves, referring to the 1991 trade paperback written and drawn by Barry Windsor-Smith. "There is no other book like this for the other [members of the X-Men] in Japan."

After the completion of *Ronin*, what's next for the Marvel Mangaverse? Cebulski hints more manga-influenced mutants will be popping up, as well as appearances by Moon Knight, the Defenders and Elektra. But will the X-Men return?

"Hopefully," he responds. "Everyone [at Marvel] is really impressed with the story and the art so we hope this will lead to a future series with the characters."

■ JAMES MCDONOUGH

manga MANIA!

ANIME BUZZBOX

CRY WOLF Dark Horse's popular reprint of Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima's *Lone Wolf and Cub* will come to a close this December with the release of the very last volume (#28) in the series, *Falling Tree*. Containing 320 digest-sized pages of riveting story, the tale of a *ronin* father and his young son will close out with one last bloody battle to remember, complete with the requisite dramatic plot twists. Incidentally, this is the first time the ending of *Lone Wolf and Cub* will see print in America.

ROBOTECH REDUX The '80s revival continues with WildStorm's December-shipping *Robotech* mini-series, based on the wildly popular anime about a powerful alien spaceship that Earth uses to defend itself against extraterrestrial invaders. A #0 issue, featuring a 12-page story written by Tommy Yune and Jay Faerber and drawn by Jim Lee, Lee Bermejo, Alé Garza and Carlos D'Anda, will kick things off on December 4. Two weeks later, issue #1, co-written by Yune and Faerber and drawn by Vo, will debut. The six-issue mini will feature storylines that predate the "Macross Saga" episodes and fill in the gaps in the series' complex continuity. All of the original characters, including Roy Fokker, Rick Hunter and of course, the *Super Dimension Fortress 1*, will appear.

TOKYO TOAST Speaking of Rintaro, ADV Films will release for the first time on DVD the acclaimed director's horror masterpiece, "Doomed Megalopolis." Told in four parts, the story takes a supernatural route to explain the devastating Tokyo earthquake of 1923. A long-dead spirit who serves as Tokyo's great guardian meets a powerful mystic's obsession with the conquest of the great city with fierce resistance. But when the mystic continues to push the issue, little does he know what destructive consequences his spells may have. "Doomed Megalopolis" is slated for a late November release.

'REIGN' STORM TokyoPop will bring the anime "Reign" to U.S. shores come February. "Reign," created by Peter Chung (creator of "Aeon Flux"), Rintaro (director of *Metropolis*) and Madhouse Studio (anime production house for "Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust," and "Trigun"), is the epic story of real-life ancient hero Alexander the Great told with a sci-fi twist. legions of warring men, man-eating horses, flying steam-powered machines, oracles and shape-shifting assassins abound. The anime was released a year ago in Japan to critical acclaim.

LIGHTS! CAMERA! TETSUOOOOO! More news on the live-action "Akira" movie from Warner Bros. has surfaced. While Stephen Norrington ("Blade") and Jon Peters ("Batman") are still attached to direct and produce, *Starman* scribe James Robinson has climbed on board to take first crack at the script (Robinson and Norrington worked together on "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen" film). "I've been a fan of the anime for many years and I understand which elements would have to be brought to a live-action translation of it," Robinson told *Variety*. "I've tried to retain as many iconic elements of the anime as possible." Robinson, who also wrote and directed the direct-to-video "Comic Book Villains" movie, is now fine-tuning a producer's draft. ■ **JEN CONTINO AND THE WIZARD STAFF**

HEAVEN SENT

'Cowboy Bebop' film debuts in U.S.A.

Get ready to "bop" your way to the movie theater! "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," the "Cowboy Bebop" movie released last year in Japan to much acclaim, has been picked up by Columbia Tristar and set for an American theatrical release this January. The "Cowboy Bebop" TV series currently airs during the "Adult Swim" programming block on Cartoon Network (courtesy of Bandai Entertainment), where it has flourished and developed a loyal following.

If you're keeping track at home, the events in the film take place between episodes 22 and 23 of the 26-episode TV series, so all the "Bebop" regulars star. Set in Earth's solar system circa 2071, the bounty-hunting crew of the spaceship *Bebop*—former gangster Spike Spiegel, ex-cop Jet Black, sexy gambling addict Faye Valentine and young hacker girl Ed—are after a big payday as they chase down a solder-turned-terrorist named Vincent, who plans to release a lethal nerve gas on Mars. Complicating matters is that no one knows what the nerve gas is or how it works, and the company that makes the gas will kill to keep it covered up. Additionally, not only does Vincent seem to be immune to the gas, he's also...dead? You'll just have to see the movie to unravel the mystery.

The 120-minute film was worked on by the same team that produced the TV series, including creator/director Watanabe Shinichirou ("Macross Plus"), character designer Kawamoto Toshihiro ("Gundam: The 08th MS Team"), animation studio Sunrise ("Escaflowne") and music composer Kanno Yoko ("Escaflowne"), whose soundtrack creations are as popular as the series itself.

"Knockin' on Heaven's Door" will be distributed in limited release to select cities. ■ **ROBERT BRICKEN**

manga MANIA!

HOT IMPORTS

MANGA

AKIRA CINEMANGA VOL 1 TP (TokyoPop) When a motorcycle accident gives Tetsuo psychic powers of cataclysmic proportions, his friend Kaneda must stop him from destroying Neo-Tokyo. $14.99

DRAGON BALL VOL. 10 TP (Viz) Goku and his friends must rethink their fighting strategy if they hope to defeat the mysterious disciples of the Crane Hermit at the 22nd Tenka'ichi Budokai martial arts tournament. $12.95

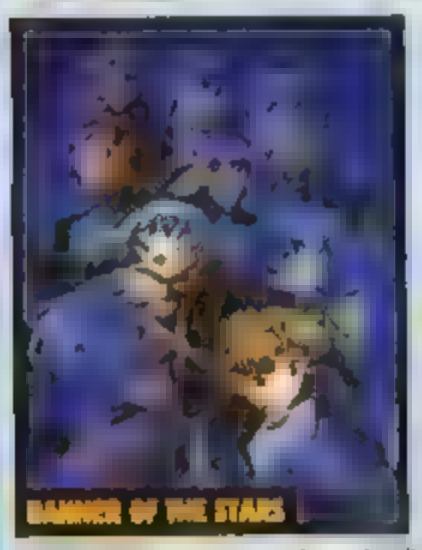
ETERNAL MIRAGE VOL. 2 #1 (Curtis Comic) After an evil tribe annihilates the defenders of Pope City, a mysterious man takes it upon himself to resurrect Inan, the leader of Pope City's protectors. $2.95

MEGATOKYO CHAPTER ZERO (Ironcat Studios) Laugh at Piro and Largo as they do almost anything in hopes of securing a way home after flying to Japan on a whim. $9.95

RAIJIN COMICS #1-4 (Gutsoon! Entertainment) Let America's first weekly manga magazine thrill you with stories of revenge, championship fighting, political intrigue and magical girls. $4.95 each

ANIME

BANNER OF THE STARS VOL. 1 (Bandai) Human Jinto and Abh Princess Lafiel struggle for peace as humanity and the Abh Empire wage war across the galaxy. DVD–$29.98



CHANCE! POP SESSION VOL 1: SESSION 1 (ADV Films) The mystical bond between a trio of musicians is revealed at a concert of their pop star idol. DVD–$29.98

HELLSING VOL. 3 WITH ALUCARD FIGURE (Pioneer) The Hellsing Organization sustains massive losses as the battle against the undead rages on, forcing Arucard to face Paladin Alexander again. DVD–$44.98

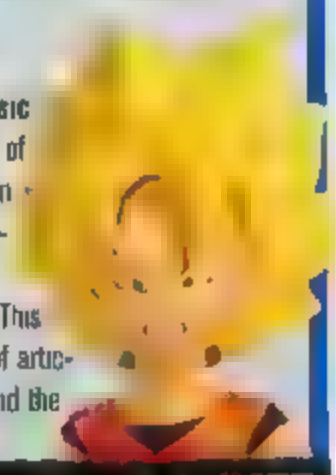
INU-YASHA VOL. 2 (Viz) Kagome and Inu-Yasha must regain the stolen "Jewel of Four Souls" at all costs, facing off against the evil Sesshomaru, Inu-Yasha's own brother! DVD–$24.98

VIRUS VOL. 1 (Manga Entertainment) When a computer virus brings a deadly prototype armored gear to life, it's up to a mysterious young upstart named Serge to bring an end to the reign of destruction. DVD–$29.95

STUFF

DRAGON BALL Z BOBBLE HEAD FIGURES (Classic Collectucritters) Enjoy the wobbly-headed joy of owning Super Saiyan Goku (right), Super Saiyan Vegeta and Piccolo with these 6" dashboard fixtures. (December) $13.99

GETTER ROBO OVA ACTION FIGURE (Kaiyodo) This 5" figure is highly detailed, has multiple points of articulation and includes a machine gun, two axes and the Mach Wing attachment. (January) $15.99



COMMENTS? QUESTIONS? STORY IDEAS? DROP US A LINE AT
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GHOST IN THE TV

Classic anime hits the small screen

On October 1st in Japan, Production I.G., the studio responsible for such anime hits as "Patlabor" and "Blood the Last Vampire," debuted the 88-minute pilot of "Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex," the new TV series based on Masamune Shirow's classic anime. The 26-episode series will be broadcast on Japanese pay-per-view over the course of the next year. Two new episodes of the hot new series will air each month.

The series features all of the same characters "Ghost in the Shell" fans have grown to love and hate, but it is set in 2030 (one year after the original series), and in an alternate universe in which Major Kusanagi did not meet the Puppet Master.

Bandai has already secured North American distribution rights, but the U.S. release date has yet to be set. ■ KUMAR SIVASUBRAMANIAN

THE BEST OF 2002

The cream of the manga and anime crop

BEST AMERICAN THEATRICAL RELEASE SPIRITED AWAY Disney finally imported Hayao Miyazaki's masterpiece to the U.S., enchanting critics and blowing fans away.

BEST ANIME TV SERIES COWBOY BEBOP Anime gets no cooler than Watanabe's ultra-hip sci-fi series, now airing on Cartoon Network.

BEST HERO D Look no further than our man D, star of Urban Vision's "Vampire Hunter D. Bloodlust."

BEST VILLAINS YU-BABA AND NO-FACE The two bad guys in "Spirited Away" both do horrible things to a terrified little girl. Shame, shame.

BEST MANGA GHOST IN THE SHELL 2: MAN-MACHINE INTERFACE Thanks to Dark Horse and Studio Proteus, the wait is finally over.

BEST DVD NEON GENESIS EVANGELION Employing "Mokup Interactive," this Manga Entertainment exclusive feature lets viewers access a comprehensive Evangelion database while watching the film.

BEST DVD FEATURE EXCEL SAGA'S VID-NOTES Basically, it's a "Pop-Up Video" for your anime. It's the perfect way to get the most out of your show. Kudos to ADV for the innovation. ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

EXTENDED FAMILY

ADV Films creates new division for original content

Congratulations! ADV's about to become a daddy!

A.D. Vision, Inc., the parent company behind ADV Films, has recently announced a new addition to its family: ADV PRO, a venture that will feature all-new, original content developed in-house, including original anime. Officially kicking things off will be the much-anticipated "Lady Death" animated feature

"Essentially, ADV PRO is the next logical step for this company," explains Marketing Director Ken Wiatrek. "It's a chance for us to take our knowledge of and love for anime and other forms of genre entertainment to the next level."

ADV Films, with its unique properties, innovative production values and large-scale distribution, helped forge the international market for anime and is a leading distributor of Japanese animation, with such titles as

"Robotech" and "Sailor Moon" under its belt

Upcoming ADV PRO projects include: "Mutineer's Moon," an animated film based on a sci-fi novel by author David Weber about an astronaut who discovers the moon is really an alien battle cruiser that has lain dormant for thousands of years; and "Honor Harrington," a live-action series based on another Weber novel about a young, female Royal Manticoran Navy officer who protects a futuristic colonized galaxy from corruption

But the U.S. of A. isn't the only place fans will be able to pick up these titles. "We're working with international format requirements in mind, so that the titles will appeal to lots of audiences and work in different nations as well," relates Wiatrek. For more information, visit **www.advfilms.com**.

■ JM&D

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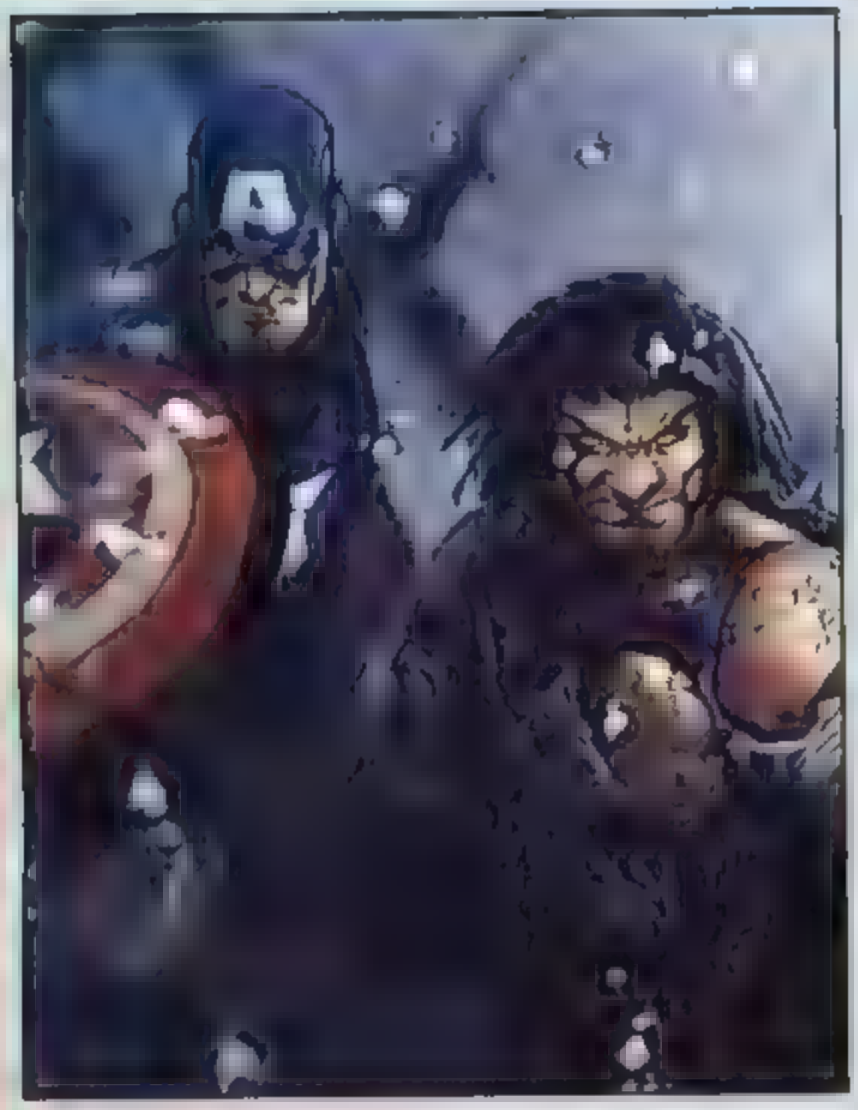


ULTIMATE WAR (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL It's the two biggest teams in the Ultimate Universe battling for their respective causes: On one side, the X-Men defending mutantkind; on the other, the Ultimates protecting humanity from extinction! Wolverine vs. Cap; Colossus vs. Iron Man; Cyclops vs. Giant-Man—what more could you want (aside from a nude throwdown between Wasp & Storm)? "The big relaunch of the Ultimate line in December features the Second Coming of Magneto," says series writer Mark Millar. "The scale of the story was just so big that there was no way the Ultimates, as a national defense force, could stay out of it. Heroes kicking the sh-- out of each other is such a great Marvel tradition!"

IN ISSUE #1 & #2 (of 6) The X-Men perpetrate a terrible crime against humanity, so Nick Fury orders the Ultimates to squash the mutants. But Xavier's soldiers aren't just for show, and they might just draw first blood in the Ultimate War! Let's hope the Ultimates can save us from those dirty, dirty muties! By Millar and Chris Bachalo. $2.25 (Dec. 4 & 26, respectively)

ALIAS: AGENT BRISTOW #0 (Arcade Comics)

WHY IT'S COOL With ABC's "Alias" taking the country by storm, it stands to reason that a comic based on the ultra-hot TV show—starring Jennifer Garner as femme fatale/super-spy Sydney Bristow—would kick ass! Throw in the fact that "Alias" creator J.J. Abrams will be writing the series, with art by Andy Park (*Tomb Raider*) and Rob Liefeld (*Youngblood*), and *Alias* looks like a sure-fire hit!

IN ISSUE #0 This ish introduces Agent Bristow to a whole new series of covert missions and adventures, and also features hot *Alias* pin-ups by a host of all-star artists. By Abrams, Park and Liefeld. $2.99 (Dec.)

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL Artist John Romita Jr. continues to wow us with each and every issue of *ASM*. Check out #45: Whether it's Spidey fighting his way out from under tons of rubble, a knock-down, drag-out slobberknocker between two Dr. Octopuses or Peter, Mary Jane and Aunt May having cake in a diner, Romita's art draws our eyes to every single panel with the force of a giant electro-magnet

IN ISSUE #48 Spider-Man is many things to many people, but to the lovely and lethal Shathra, he's just yummy! By J. Michael Straczynski, Romita Jr. and Scott Hanna. $2.50 (Dec. 11)

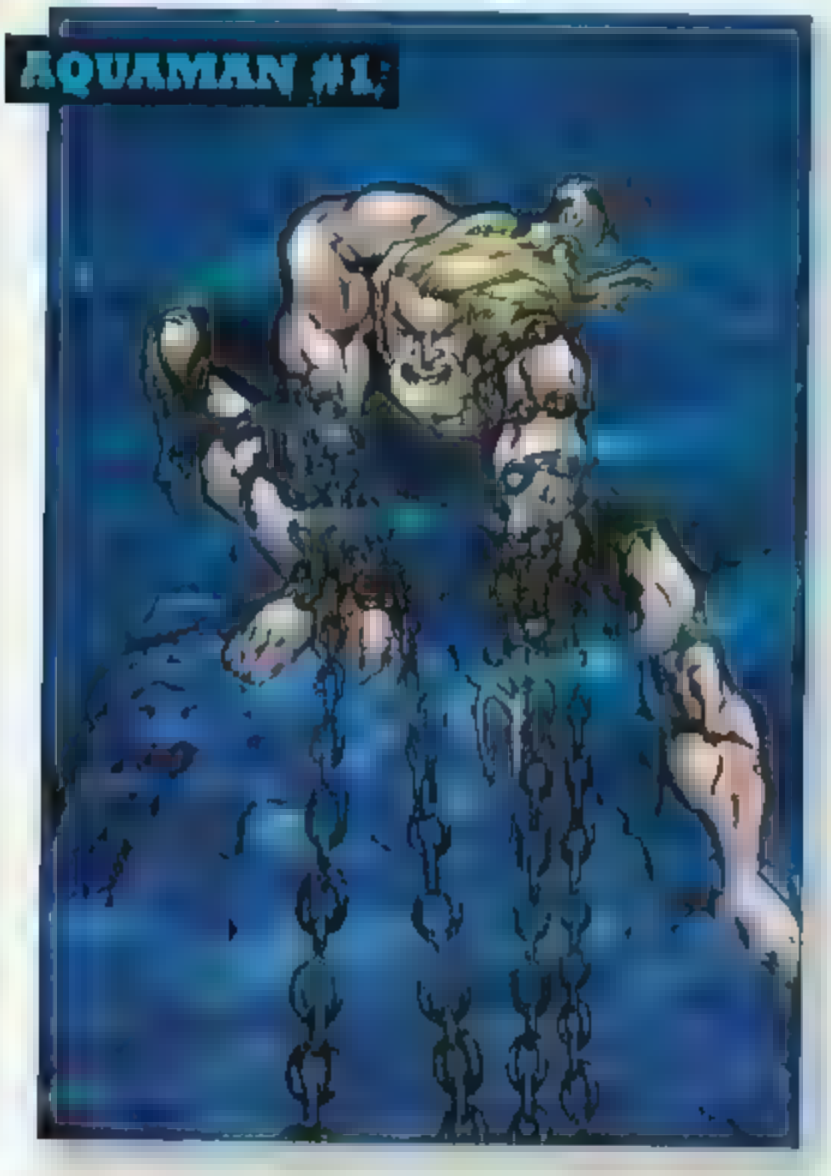
AQUAMAN (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL One of the JLA's "Big Seven" gets his own book once again, and if the relaunches of some other top DC properties—like *Legion*, *Green Arrow* and *Hawkman*—are any indication, this new direction for Aquaman should make a big splash with readers!

IN ISSUE #1 In the aftermath of the "Obsidian Age" storyline, Aquaman finds himself banished from the oceans and discovers that all sea creatures have been instructed to kill him! The former Sea King finds sanctuary with the mysterious Lady of the Lake, who presents him with a brand-new destiny. "What I found interesting about [Aquaman] is that he's always been sort of an angry jerk," says series writer Rick Veitch (*Greyshirt: Indigo Sunset*). "And when I began to evolve him out of that attitude, to make him more mature and in tune with his heroic ideals, I started to like him. He's a character who in many ways is growing up, if not physically, then emotionally. Add to that the new powers he discovers and the new freshwater realms he begins exploring and we're onto

MR TITLES DENOTED WITH AN MR CONTAIN MATERIAL THAT'S SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS.

something cool and different." By Veitch, Yvel Guichet and Mark Propst. **$2.50** (Dec. 11)



AVENGERS (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL Talk about a high-water mark: check out *Avengers* #58 for what will surely be one of the most talked-about moments in team lore! The Avengers are out to sea and about to be swept into a swirling energy maelstrom, when Sub-Mariner shows up to save their ship with his bare hands! His proclamation to Cap is even more dramatic than his entrance: "Consider the Sub-Mariner back on active duty with the Avengers. And this is not a request."

IN ISSUE #61 & #62 The Avengers undergo another roster change, and a creative one as well, as new penciler Gary Frank (*Midnight Nation*) joins Earth's Mightiest for a two-issue stint. "I've been spoiled lately in not working with a bad writer," notes Frank. "[Writer] Geoff [Johns] has a great feel for what makes a particular character interesting. For example, I've never been a huge Jack of Hearts fan, but in issue #63, [Geoff] has completely turned that character around and made him understandable and likeable." By Johns, Frank and Jon Sibal **$2.50** (Dec. 11 & 26, respectively)

BATTLE OF THE PLANETS (Top Cow)

WHY IT'S COOL The G-Force family's about as functional as the Osbournes, so of course, they make for super-entertaining reads. Check out issue #3: After the team gets reamed for blowing it on the their very first mission, Mark and Jason are already throwing punches at each other to prove who's top dog. Does the winner get to fly the coop with Princess?

IN ISSUE #6 A new four-part arc called "Under a Blood Red Sky" kicks off here, as Zoltar unleashes a deadly viral weapon that'll give him control over the minds of those infected. By Muneer Sharneff, Wilson Tortosa, Shane Law and Alex Ross **$2.99** (Dec.)

newreleases

BUTTON MAN: THE KILLING GAME (Rebellion) What do bored millionaires do in their spare time? They hire "Button Men" to play The Game, a deadly cat-and-mouse competition where hired killers hunt one another to the death. But what happens when killer Harry Exton wants out? **MR. $24** (Dec.)

COURTNEY CRUMRIN & THE COVEN OF MYSTICS #1 (of 4) (Oni Press) Supernatural activity is on the rise once again, and it's up to the cute but curmudgeonly Courtney to save the day—without her parents finding out! But what does Uncle Aloysius have to do with all this witchcraft craziness? $2.95 (Dec.)

DRAGON ARMS #1 (Antarctic Press) Thousands of years ago, the greatest warriors combined forces to overthrow the evil Dragon Kings. But when these warriors become twisted and tyrannical with power, who can oppose them? That's what the wizard Arrack hopes to find out! $4.95 (Dec.)

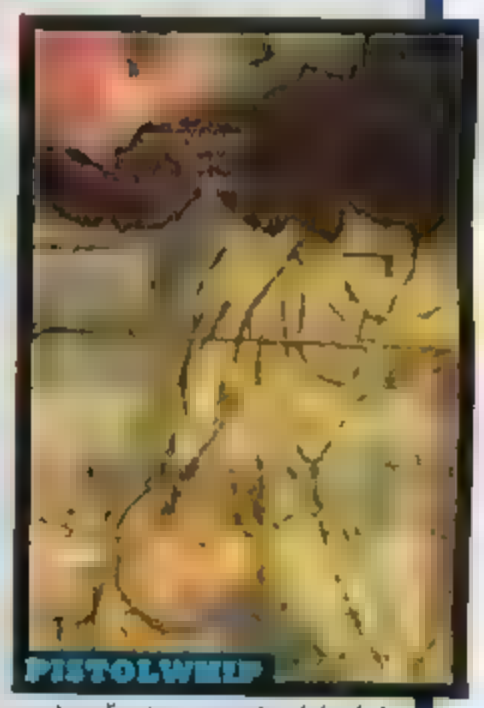
GLOOM COOKIE: A MONSTER'S CHRISTMAS COLOR SPECIAL (Amaze Ink/SLG) The Monster has wound up on Santa's "Naughty" list, thanks to his appetite for young boys and girls, but he's trying to mend his ways on Christmas Eve so St. Nick will pay him a visit. **MR. $3.95** (Dec.)

HAWAIIAN DICK #1 (of 3) (Image) Long before Magnum patrolled the Aloha State, grizzled P.I. Byrd worked the shadowy cases that plagued Hawaii in the early 1950s. Can he and his partner Mo survive tropical tiki terrors? $2.95 (Dec. 18)

KILLBOX #1 (Antarctic Press) Join a Marine Corps M-1 tank crew as they must cross the scorching Iraqi desert. But will their dangerous mission be jeopardized by a pair of U.S. missionaries in need of rescue? $5 (Dec.)

LITTLE GLOOMY ADVENTURES #1 (Amaze Ink/SLG) Little Gloomy takes on a pair of supernatural menaces in this one-shot, including an army of evil cats and a sick mummy. $3.95 (Dec.)

PISTOLWHIP: THE YELLOW MENACE (Top Shelf) The Pistolwhip gang returns with another hard-boiled noir mystery, this time involving comics, pulp novels, serial movies and the hero who makes them all popular—Jack Peril. $14.95 (Dec.)



RADISKULL AND DEVIL DOLL: HATE CHRISTMAS ONE-SHOT (Image) The death-and-destruction-loving demon Radiskull and his partner Devil Doll wage Yuletide war against the nicest guy alive, Santa Claus! $2.50 (Dec. 4)

REX MUNDI #1 (Image) Master Physician Julien Saunière discovers a possible link between the theft of an ancient medieval manuscript and the dark forces at work in this alternate universe Paris, where kings still rule and evil magic is practiced in the shadows. $2.95 (Dec. 11)

TOM JUDGE: END OF DAYS #1 (Top Cow) Lapsed Catholic priest Tom Judge controls the Rapture, the most powerful force in creation. And he'll have to use it to protect the universe from warring factions of demons and angels. $3.99 (Dec.)

TRIAL BY FIRE #1 (of 5) (Coda 6/C6E) Based on the hit fantasy novel series by R.A. Salvatore, this mini-series tells the harrowing tale of a young barbarian named Andacanavar as he embarks on one of his earliest adventures to save his land from the DemonWar. $2.95 (Dec. 4)

DAREDEVIL (Marvel Knights)

WHY IT'S COOL Brian Michael Bendis can tap into his characters' consciousness like an expert psychoanalyst. Check out Matt Murdock's internal monologue in issue #37 as he's talking to Elektra—Bendis manages to drop in a classic line that reflects Matt's fortitude despite tumultuous circumstances. Angry at the Black Widow for setting him up with Elektra, Matt muses, "Natasha. Wherever you are, you are the single worst ex-girlfriend that ever existed. And coming from me...that is saying something."

IN ISSUE #40 It's the final chapter to "The Trial of the Century," as Matt Murdock must clear the White Tiger in a high-profile cop-killing case. By Bendis and Manuel Gutierrez. **$2.99** (Dec. 11)

FANTASTIC FOUR (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL No character has blossomed more during Mark Waid's run than the Invisible Woman. It's always been understood that she's the glue that holds the FF together, but let's face it; without her, the rest of the team would be lost. She's able to juggle kids, a husband—and a global adventuring team worth billions that just so happens to save the universe on a weekly basis. We can't wait to see where Sue Richards goes from here.

IN ISSUE #64 The Human Torch, a.k.a. Johnny Storm, is gonna have to crank up the heat to save his teammates, in the chilling conclusion to the "Sentient" storyline. By Waid, Mike Wieringo and Karl Kesel. **$2.25** (Dec. 26)

FLASH (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL Something fishy's brewing in *The Flash*, and we're ready to reel in that payoff! In issue #190, the story focuses on the Rogue called Pied Piper, who goes to both James Jesse (the former Trickster) and Heat Wave, a reformed Rogue, for help when he's wanted by the cops. But Jesse has an employment proposition for both former baddies—one that they must keep secret from their pal the Flash. Think we're gonna need a bigger boat!

IN ISSUE #193 Gorilla Grodd's rampage has freed every supervillain in Iron Heights, and it's up to the Flash to put the kibosh on this pissed-off primate and return all the baddies to their cells. By Geoff Johns, Scott Kolins and Doug Hazlewood. **$2.25** (Dec. 26)

GREEN ARROW

WHY IT'S COOL New writer Brad Meltzer continues to add more layers to the Green Arrow mythos than you'll find in a Dagwood Sandwich. Like in issue #17, when readers learn that G.A. asked the reformed supervillain Shade to handle his personal affairs in the event of his death. What relationship do these two disparate characters have? Don't know, but we can't wait to see it unfold.

IN ISSUE #39 It's Part 5 of "The Archer's Quest," as the Justice League shows up while Green Arrow and Arsenal continue to hunt down snippets of their past. "Kevin [Smith] obviously did a great job when he brought Ollie back from the dead," explains Meltzer. "I wanted to get him back into his life. What are the consequences of that? We just accept his return as readers, but it's ridiculous! You don't just walk into your room and pick up your stuff. That's what Ollie's trying to deal with in 'Archer's Quest.'" By Meltzer, Phil Hester and Ande Parks. **$2.50** (Dec. 26)

INCREDIBLE HULK (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL *Hulk* readers better strap themselves in, the roller coaster ride that Bruce Jones has been treating you to is about to hit terminal velocity! Still on the run and wanted

for murder, Bruce finds the conspiracy surrounding him and his green alter ego growing even murkier when Agent Pratt—who died a few months back—shows up in issue #45 with a gun to Bruce's head.

IN ISSUE #48 "From Here to Infinity" is the title of this tale as Agent Pratt's got a deadly secret that he dearly wants to share with Bruce and his gal-pal Sandra Verdugo. By Jones, Stuart Immonen and Scott Koblish. **$2.25** (Dec. 18)

JSA (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL There's something sinister brewing in the pages of *JSA*, and the aroma's got us salivating like a pack of starving dogs. In issue #40, the team comes out on top during a hostage crisis, but it's the cliffhanger ending that grabbed us: Black Adam, Atom Smasher, Northwind and Brainwave hatching an evil plot against their teammates! Could there by dissension in the ranks? *Viva la revolucion!*

IN ISSUE #43 In ancient Egypt, Captain Marvel, Hawkgirl and Mr. Terrific must team up with a trio of ancient heroes to stop a bloodthirsty dictator. By David Goyer, Geoff Johns, Leonard Kirk and Keith Champagne. **$2.50** (Dec. 18)

LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN VOL. 2 (WildStorm/DC)

WHY IT'S COOL Alan Moore has really amped up the danger and suspense quotient for the League this time around, as Mina Murray finds out in issue #3—much to her dismay. The Invisible Man shows his true colors by conspiring with the invading Martians, stealing England's defense plans and attacking and humiliating Mina in the process, even forcing her to grovel in her own vomit. That's no way to treat a lady!

IN ISSUE #5 (of 6) One of the League dies in this issue! Allan and Mina race across England to enlist the help of a mysterious doctor and his invention that could stop the Martians from invading London. By Moore and Kevin O'Neill. **$3.50** (Dec. 26)

THE LEGION (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL If you ever wondered how a brawl between the Legion and the JLA would shake down, check out the main event in *Legion* #12! Superman vs. M'Onel, Ultra Boy vs. Wonder Woman, Chameleon vs. Martian Manhunter—the battles come fast and furious! And the outcome is nothing like what you'd expect!

IN ISSUE #15 Timber Wolf joins the team at a tumultuous time, as relations within the team and around the United Planets are strained, one Legionnaire mulls over a vacation and a fallen comrade is mourned. By Dan Abnett, Andy Lanning and Kev Walker. **$2.50** (Dec. 26)

NEW X-MEN (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL Readers got a taste of what's to come from new rotating artist Phil Jimenez, and all we can say is—bring us another course! Issue #132 featured Jimenez's stunning pencils, as the artist expertly rendered the ruined mutant nation of Genosha in all its horrifying glory. Jimenez will be sharing pencilling duties with returning artist Frank Quitely, and there isn't a better 1-2 combination in comics right now!

IN ISSUE #135 It's the "Riot at Xavier's," as the students rebel against the teachers in a battle of generational proportions. Some will live, some will die and writer Grant Morrison promises this arc will shake up the X-Universe like no other before it! By Morrison, Quitely and Tim Townsend **$2.25** (Dec. 18)

ROBOTECH (WildStorm/DC)

WHY IT'S COOL The classic anime series comes to life as an American comic title thanks to WildStorm and DC, and if the

ontheedge

THE BRAWL FOR IT ALL: DAIRY VS. PRODUCE!

You couldn't ask for a more hilarious or nutritional crossover when the World's Toughest Milkman, Reid Fleming, battles the Flaming Carrot!

The Flaming Carrot, champion of Iron City and founding member of the Mysterymen, joins forces with Reid Fleming to skewer pop culture as only these two bizarre icons can, in this, the **Reid Fleming/Flaming Carrot Crossover #1** from Dark Horse Comics (**www.darkhorse.com**). When they're not battling the terrible trio of Fabio, Pavaroth and Christopher Walken, they're breaking into Major Motion Picture studios to raid the vaults for their own twisted ends. Look for *Reid Fleming/Flaming Carrot Crossover* #1 in stores on Dec. 26 for **$3.99**

nostalgia factor wasn't enough, the publisher's enlisted some big-name talent to get this series off the ground. Jim Lee, Alé Garza, Kaare Andrews, Adam Warren, Lee Bermejo, Tommy Yune and giant robots full of others!

IN ISSUE #0 In this prelude edition, an alien spacecraft crashes in the South Pacific, setting events in motion that will draw Earth into a planetary war. By Yune, Jay Faerber, Lee, Bermejo, Garza, Carlos D'Anda, Warren, Andrews, Randy Green, Long Vo, Dustin Nguyen and Keron Grant. $2.50 (Dec. 4)

ISSUE #1 (of 6) Ace fighter pilot Roy Fokker becomes the first recruit to pilot the massive mechas against the alien threats nearing Earth. By Yune, Faerber, Vo and Udon. $2.95 (Dec. 18)

RUSE: ARCHARD'S AGENTS (CGE)

WHY IT'S COOL *Ruse* features some of the kookiest supporting characters around—like the bearded midget lady, the retired pugilist and the foul-mouthed chimney sweep that all aid detective Simon Archard in his pursuit of justice. Archard's agents take the spotlight this time around, combining forces to battle the Consortium of Aggrieved Manservants. And is there any force more terrifying than a league of pissed-off butlers?

IN ISSUE #1 The Agents must step up big against the Consortium, which almost successfully killed Archard and Emma Bishop a few months back. By Chuck Dixon and Mike Perkins. $2.95 (Dec. 26)

SOJOURN (CGE)

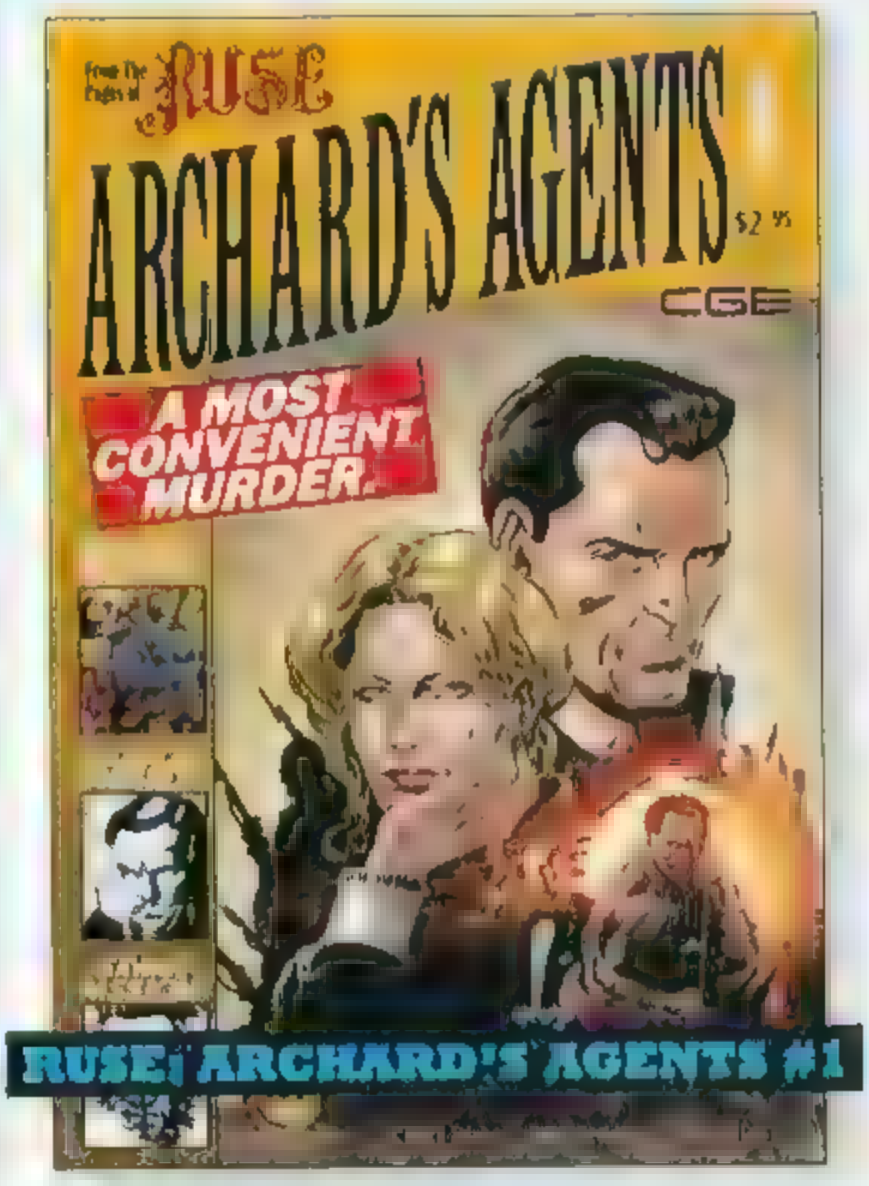
WHY IT'S COOL We can't stress this enough. Greg Land rocks! Whether it's beautiful females, insane action sequences, horrifying troll armies or simple visual storytelling (you get all of 'em in issue #14!), Land has emerged as one of the top artists in the biz, and every issue of *Sojourn* propels him further up the ladder.

IN ISSUE #18 Arwyn, Gareth and the winged Ankharans enter a bloody battle with the troll army, but even if they win, can Arwyn convince the Ankharans to surrender the Second Fragment of Ayden's bow? By Ron Marz, Greg Land and Jay Leisten. $2.95 (Dec. 11)

SPIDER-MAN'S TANGLED WEB (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL Writer/artist Darwyn Cooke (*Catwoman: Selina's Big Score*) crafted a terrific Valentine's Day *Tangled Web* story back in February, so we're psyched to see what he's got in store for this, the Christmas ish. Cooke proved his writing chops on *Big Score*, so expect a big treat under your stocking with this Yuletide tale.

IN ISSUE # 21 Cooke crafts this crazy Christmas tale starring Spidey and a host of Marvel beauties, including the Invisible Woman and Crystal and Medusa of the Inhumans By Cooke and Jay Bone. $2.99 (Dec. 26)



STAR WARS: EMPIRE (Dark Horse)

WHY IT'S COOL The Star Wars universe has never looked so good, thanks to the amazing artwork of penciler Ryan Benjamin. From Darth Vader to the Star Destroyers to the futuristic planet of Coruscant, Benjamin renders them all with the expert strokes of a master Jedi wielding his lightsaber. If issue #1 is any indication, the Force is strong in this series! "With Ryan, he does all these big, epic shots in just three or four panels," explains Scott Allie, writer of the "Betrayal" storyarc. "I love it. His visual approach to the characters really inspired me in different directions. He

was just great to work with."

IN ISSUE #4 A young Jedi knight proposes a partnership with Lord Vader to overthrow the Emperor, while a cadre of Imperial officers attempts a coup of their own. By Allie, Benjamin and Curtis Arnold. **$2.99** (Dec. 4)

TRUTH (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL Marvel continues to rock the House of Ideas off its foundations with dramatic and controversial projects. First, it was telling Wolverine's never-before-revealed background in *Origin*. Now, it's turning the Captain America mythos on its ear by introducing a new spin: What if a black soldier were actually the first Sentinel of Liberty instead of Steve Rogers?

IN ISSUE #2 (of 6) The search for the very first Captain America continues, but Steve Rogers is nowhere to be seen; instead, it'll be one of three African-American soldiers being drafted into the Super-Soldier program. By Robert Morales and Kyle Baker. **$3.50** (Dec. 18)

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL Sometimes, it's not the destination that matters as much as the journey, and *Ultimate Spider-Man* #28 proves that tenet in spades. With the Rhino rampaging in downtown Manhattan, Peter attempts to ditch school to get to the scene. Unfortunately, he's gotta deal with a parent/teacher conference, his girlfriend, a troubled classmate, the principal, school bullies and crosstown traffic...only to have Iron Man scoop him on the save. Days like that make you wonder why you put on the tights.

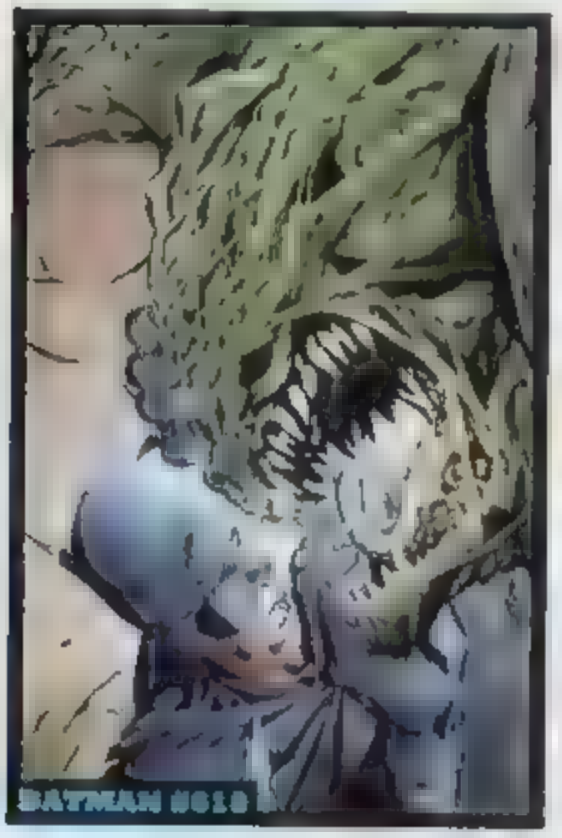
IN ISSUE #32 & #33 Fans requested him, and Brian Michael Bendis relented. Prepare for the Ultimate coming of Venom! By Bendis, Mark Bagley and Art Thibert. **$2.25** (Dec. 4 & Dec. 18, respectively)

BAT-MANIA

The Bat has flown the belfry and he's headed straight to the summit of the Diamond Top 100 list.

When Jim Lee and Jeph Loeb took over DC's *Batman* with issue #608, that move immediately catapulted the title to the forefront of Diamond's sales chart, leaping 31 spots from the previous month to become the No. 1 book for October with 123,491 initial orders! Expect that momentum to continue for as long as Lee and Loeb are on the title, with their 12-issue storyline entitled "Hush," which continues this month in Part 3 in **BATMAN #610** ($2.25, Dec. 26). Batman and Amanda Waller let Killer Croc escape Arkham so they can track him to his employer and discover who stole the missing $10 million ransom. But the heat around the city's getting turned up by none other than Catwoman!

But that's not the only Bat-title burning up the racks this month, check out this murderer's row lineup of Bat-books shipping in December



BATGIRL #35 Batgirl aids Batman in tracking down the mysterious killer named Alpha, but he's trying to cook both their geeses with a nuke that he's planted in Gotham! $2.50 (Dec. 11)

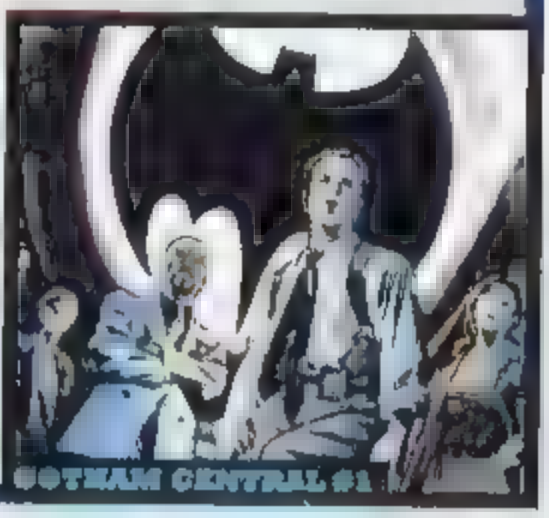
BATGIRL: YEAR ONE #1 (OF 9) Before Cassandra Cain adopted the secret identity, Barbara Gordon patrolled Gotham as Batgirl. Learn of the events that transformed her from overachieving college student into a disciple of the Dark Knight. $2.95 (Dec. 18

BATMAN/ALIENS II #1 (of 3) When a construction crew uncovers a sealed vault containing one of the vile face huggers, it's up to Batman to keep this ravenous Alien from wiping out Gotham City. $5.95 (Dec. 26)

BIRDS OF PREY #50 *Love and Rockets* co-creator Gilbert Hernandez hops on board with artist Casey Jones for a six-issue run. Black Canary's had enough adventuring, so she's off for a bit of a vacation, which gets interrupted when she's kidnapped by the simian strongman named Simon Stagg (and where he goes, Metamorpho is sure to be close by). $2.50 (Dec. 18)

DETECTIVE COMICS #777 Writer Ed Brubaker jumps over to *Tec* starting with this ish, as someone's picking off Batman's Rogues Gallery, starting with the new Killer Moth. And all signs point to Two-Face as the culprit! And look for covers by the sensational Tim Sale! $2.75 (Dec. 4

GOTHAM CENTRAL #1 & #2 The cops of the Gotham City Police Department get their own series, courtesy of Ed Brubaker and Greg Rucka! When one of their own falls during the line of duty, the GCPD won't let anything get in their way of nailing the killer—even Batman! $2.50 each (Dec. 4 & Dec. 26, respectively)



BREAKDOWN FOR DISCERNING READERS

ratedMforMature

Since history usually ranks first on students' lists of most-hated subjects, maybe schools should consider using *American Century* as the textbook.

This ongoing mature readers' title from DC/Vertigo probably wouldn't cut it for the lower grades, but seniors and college students could find a whole new appreciation for history by reading this thought-provoking, literary and entertaining title starring main character Harry Kraft. Kraft is a disillusioned suburbanite in the 1950s who ditches his mundane existence, adopts a new identity, and travels the world experiencing all it has to offer, both good and bad.

"My belief is that the five years between 1946-1950 are the last golden moments in the American Dream," explains Howard Chaykin, who co-writes the series with his collaborator David Tischman. "Everything's been going to hell since then. And it's fun to play with telling the story of an empire that's in the beginning of a downslide. And 1950 was the beginning of the American downside, but it was still a very picturesque time."

In **AMERICAN CENTURY #21**, it's Part 5 of the "Coming Home" storyline, as Harry wraps up his adventure in his hometown of Chicago. Harry'll do anything to get free of his ex-wife's twisted grasp, including blackmail, theft, arson, mayhem and assaulting a police officer! **MR.** $2.75 (Dec. 18)

And check out these other mature readers' books shipping in December

ALIAS #17 (MAX/Marvel) Loads of surprise guest-stars appear this ish, including Spider-Man and J. Jonah Jameson, as Jessica embarks on her strangest case yet, which takes her on a real down-and-dirty tour of the Marvel Universe. **MR.** $2.99 (Dec. 4)

CODENAME: KNOCKOUT #19 (Vertigo/DC) Learn the secret origins of the Kevin clones, in this "Flashback" story to 1969. The original Kevin teams up with superspy Godiva Priestly to save the British Royal Family. **MR.** $2.75 (Dec. 4)

FABLES #8 (Vertigo/DC) The animal Fables residing at the Farm are openly revolting, and the target at the top of their hit list is none other than Snow White. **MR.** $2.50 (Dec. 18)

HELLBLAZER #179 (Vertigo/DC) John finds himself caught between a rock and a hard place, as he must battle a decomposing demon and a sadistic mage to save his niece Gemma. **MR.** $2.75 (Dec. 26)

HELLBLAZER SPECIAL: LADY CONSTANTINE #1 (of 4) (Vertigo/DC) Lady Johanna Constantine, an ancestor of John Constantine operating in 1785, becomes embroiled in a scheme to track down one of the most powerful mystic devices on Earth: The Infernal Box! **MR.** $2.95 (Dec. 18)

100 BULLETS #41 (Vertigo/DC) The fifth in a series of stand-alone issues focuses its sights on the man who makes everything go in *100 Bullets*: Agent Graves. What drives him on his mission, and what does he hope to gain? All will be revealed... and more questions will be raised! **MR.** $2.50 (Dec. 4)

WAR STORY: [illegible]ENNY (Vertigo/DC)) It's 1943, and Germany finds itself under relentless bombing raids from the Allies. But even these crack pilots can find themselves plagued by doubts about the nature of their targets...especially when there's innocent civilians involved. **MR.** $4.95 (Dec. 11)

Y--THE LAST MAN #6 (Vertigo/DC) A new five-part storyarc called "Cycles" gets underway, as Yorick Brown and his traveling companions ride the rails across America on an important quest. But will they reach their destination with the deadly Daughters of the Amazon on the trail? **MR.** $2.95 (Dec. 18)

UNCANNY X-MEN (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL Chuck Austen crafts one of the most touching X-tales we've read in a long while (issue #414), and the star happens to be the former Alpha Flighter, Northstar. The super-speedster is forced to face his own shortcomings—as a hero and a person—when he can't help a young boy with deadly explosive powers. But he's gonna do his best to redeem himself by joining the X-Men full time.

IN ISSUE #416 The Juggernaut may be a current X-Man, but he's got some dark secrets he's keeping from his new teammates. And international superstar Kia Asamiya (*Silent Moebius*) joins the title as regular artist! Asamiya says some of his X-influences include past superstars like Jim Lee, Joe Madureira and Chris Bachalo. "I hope to raise the bar they set and have my name on the list of influential X-Men artists along with them some day," explained the artist. By Austen and Asamiya. $2.25 (Dec. 4)

X-STATIX (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL *X-Statix* takes everything you love and hate about reality TV, fame and superheroes, throws it all in a blender and hits the "Frappe" switch! Look for scenarios like: lawyers sued to have members kicked off the team; Dead Girl and the Anarchist quitting the team to go on tour with their "Death & Anarchy Roadshow"; and a fabricated team of heroes called O-Force getting murdered by an army of the undead on live TV! *X-Statix* is a bizarre, mind bending trip—and dead on accurate, if mutant heroes really existed.

IN ISSUE #6 The team continues to tear itself apart from the inside, as the Orphan and the Anarchist trade blows once more. By Peter Milligan and Mike Allred. $2.25 (Dec. 26)

You wanted 'em, you asked for 'em and now you got 'em—trade paperbacks out the ying-yang! Go nuts; there's something here for everyone!

FABLES: LEGENDS IN EXILE (Vertigo/DC)

WHY IT'S COOL One of the most imaginative series to hit stands in years gets its very first collection, and we couldn't be more psyched. If you don't know what all the hubbub's about, be sure to pick up this trade that collects the first five-issue storyarc. The Fables are a race of fairy tale characters exiled from their homeland and forced to live secret lives in New York City among the "mundanes." But when one of their own turns up dead, life for the Fables is going to be anything but that!

BOTTOM LINE Wanna be able to live happily ever after? Give this creative, hilarious series a chance and you'll never look at fairy tales the same way ever again. **MR. $14.95** (Dec. 11)

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN VOL. 3 (Marvel) When Peter Parker travels to L.A. to meet with his estranged wife Mary Jane, he gets more than he bargained for in the process—a fight with two Dr. Octopuses! (Is that even a word?) **$12.99** (Dec. 4)

ASTRO BOY VOL. 10 (Dark Horse) In this edition, Astro Boy must fight the enormous and mighty menace called Garon, solve the "100 Million Year Old Crime" and thwart his own theft. Who'd wanna steal Astro Boy? **$9.95** (Dec. 25)

CAGE (MAX/Marvel) In this oversized hardcover, Luke Cage, once known as Power Man, is transformed from ghetto fabulous crusader to gritty urban enforcer, courtesy of creators Brian Azzarello and Richard Corben. **MR. $19.99** (Nov. 27)

BASTARD SAMURAI VOL. 1: SAMURAI NOIR (Image) Jim, a killer at the top of his class at the KoZu sword school in modern-day New York City, undergoes a radical change of heart that causes him to turn on his teachers and bring down their evil gladiator games. Look for loads of DVD-like extras, including pinups, deleted scenes and the five-page preview that appeared in *Powers* #17! **MR. $12.95** (Dec. 4)

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL: BEASTS (Dark Horse) The immortal Manji must pull himself together (literally, after being dismembered by thugs) to help his companion Rin in her search for her parents' killer. Collects issues #66–#72 of the regular series. **MR. $14.95** (Dec. 18)

THE CALL OF DUTY VOL. 1: THE BROTHERHOOD (Marvel) A band of firefighters, EMT workers and policemen work together to solve the mystery of an enigmatic young girl who shows up at multiple emergency sites. **$14.99** (Dec. 26)

DAREDEVIL VOL. 2 HC (Marvel) What will happen to Matt Murdock and Daredevil when their secret identity is revealed to the world? Find out here, in this collection of *Daredevil* #26–#37! **$29.99** (Dec. 4)

ELEKTRA VOL. 1: INTROSPECT (Marvel) The deadly assassin finds herself targeted for destruction by a group of victimized survivors, in this collection of Greg Rucka's run from *Elektra* #10–#15. **$16.99** (Dec. 11)

G.I. JOE VOL. II: RECKONINGS (Image) This collection of *G.I. Joe* #6–#9 showcases the return of both Cobra Commander and Storm Shadow to the new Joe Universe! **$12.95** (Dec. 11)

GREYSHIRT: INDIGO SUNSET (WildStorm/DC) Little is known about the dapper detective called Greyshirt, but his origins will be revealed in this collection of the six-issue mini-series. **$19.95** (Dec. 11)

LONE WOLF AND CUB: FALLING TREE (Dark Horse) This is it! The collection fans have been waiting for—the final chapter in the Lone Wolf and Cub saga, collected in the States for the first time ever! Find out the final fate of Itto and Daigoro as they reach the end of journey for vengeance. **MR. $9.95** (Dec. 26)

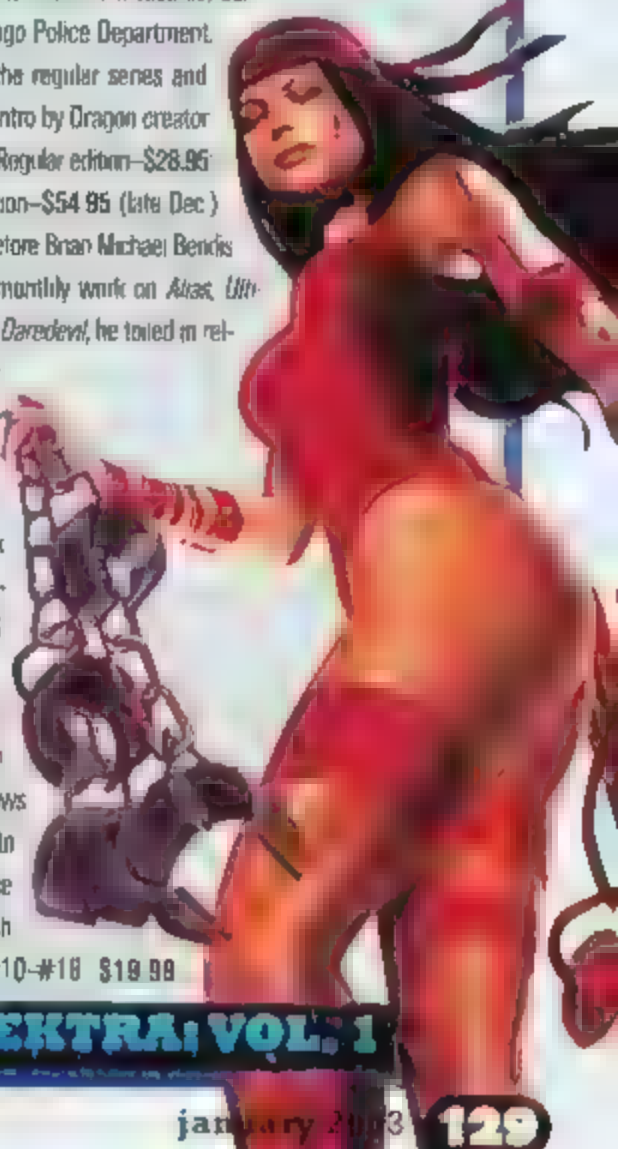
NEW X-MEN VOL. 3: NEW WORLDS (Marvel) Many questions are posed in this collection of issues #127–#133, including: Who is Xorn? What is the secret of Weapon XI? And is Magneto really dead? **$14.99** (Dec. 18)

PROMETHEA BOOK 2 (WildStorm/DC) The transcendental adventure of the latest Promethea, the young woman named Sophie Bangs, continues, as she learns the secrets of the Immateria and gets a lesson in sex education of all things. **$14.95** (Dec. 11)

SAVAGE DRAGON VOL. VIII: TERMINATED (Image) The Dragon falls on hard times, and must turn to extreme measures, during his final days on the Chicago Police Department. Collects issues #34–#40 of the regular series and includes a sketchbook, a new intro by Dragon creator Erik Larsen and loads of Dang! Regular edition–$28.95; Limited Signed Hardcover edition–$54.95 (late Dec.)

TOTAL SELL OUT (Image) Before Brian Michael Bendis took over the world with his monthly work on *Alias*, *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Powers* and *Daredevil*, he toiled in relative obscurity and worked his buns off creating the short stories collected in this edition. Check out the groundbreaking crime and anecdotal work Bendis created before becoming a Total Sell Out. **MR. $14.95** (Dec. 11)

X-TREME X-MEN VOL. 2: INVASION! (Marvel) When an interdimensional armada shows up on Earth's doorstep, it's up to the X-Treme X-Men to give these party crashers the bums' rush. Collects *X-Treme X-Men* #10–#16. **$19.99** (Dec. 18)



SECRET STASH

comics' hidden gems

TEENAGERS FROM MARS

A GROUP OF REBELLIOUS TEENAGERS STUCK IN A SMALL TOWN FIGHT FOR THEIR RIGHT–TO READ COMICS?!

THE DIRT A new drug has invaded the small, all-American town of Mars, causing its teenagers to commit major crimes to get it. The drug: comic books, and the punk rock teen cast of *Teenagers from Mars* has a heroin-like addiction to them.

DOYA LIKE? Take a John Hughes film, mix in a little of Los Bros. Hernandez' *Love & Rockets*, some EC horror comics, a Misfits song and voila! You get *Teenagers from Mars*.

DIDJA KNOW? Series creators Rick Spears and Rob G grew up in Richmond, Va. and went to the same college, but didn't meet each other until they both moved to Brooklyn, N.Y.

A plague has infected the small town of Mars.

Teenagers rob graves to feed an insatiable addiction. When authorities try and stop them, they revolt with acts of vandalism. It isn't drugs causing this all-American town with the strange name so many problems. The cause of Mars' troubles—as Fredric Wertham predicted in his anti-comic rant *Seduction of the Innocent*—begins and ends with comic books.

Teenagers from Mars, a bi-monthly ongoing series self-published by writer Rick Spears and penciler Rob G, is the story of a group of high schoolers who love comics so much that—like Malcolm X—they'll obtain them by any means necessary. According to Spears, the inspiration for the series came from another crusader who stood in the face of adversity.

"It all started with Mike Diana's comic book censorship case [in which Diana was found guilty of obscenity charges for materials published in his 'zine, *Boiled Angel*], and someone suggested that when dealing with censorship, comic creators, retailers and fans should start acting like the heroes they create, read and sell," explains Spears. "From there I threw in a bunch of punk rock, zombies and John Hughes-type sh--, and we were off."

The series opens with Max, a typical suburban 14-year-old who, along with pals Punk Danny and Spock, maintains an after-school "job" in order to buy a copy of *Beyond Adventure*, a $5,000 comic book back-issue. The job? Looting Civil War-era graves for relics to sell to a local pawnshop.

Then there's Macon, another Mars teen, a rock-star wrapped in a Mall-Mart smock. A disillusioned cog in a corporate machine of discount super-stores, Macon aspires to release a controversial comic titled *Lines of Paper*. In one of *TFM*'s more humorous twists, Macon reaches his breaking point when Max's angry mother berates him for selling a violent comic to her, um, innocent son. This gets Macon fired from Mall-Mart, and then he angrily clocks his manager, only to get his own ass kicked in return!

"Even though he gets beat up—and he always gets beat up—he's the type of guy who always takes that step; he always stands up," attests Spears. "That's more admirable than winning fights every time."

VIOLENT HOSTILE When Macon (the mullet dude on the left) gets fired at the local Mall-Mart for selling "violent" comics, he picks a fight that he'll never, ever win.

Macon's world turns upside down when he meets Madison, a riot grrl with the disposition to match her punk rock look. After she encounters a pervert who spies a peak at her undies in the Mall-Mart, Madison beats the lech with a wooden clothes hanger!

Taking angst and troublemaking to new heights is Rob G, whose pencils blend influences of manga and mainstream. Not since Humberto Ramos has an artist been so adept at capturing the style and mannerisms of teenagers.

In November's *TFM* #4, Macon and Madison take a stab at a normal date, but wherever they go, trouble inevitably follows.

"After helping Max and the gang sneak in, Macon gets into an altercation with an usher," hints Spears. "The usher proceeds to beat Macon savagely, until Madison comes to the rescue."

Meanwhile, Max and and Co. realize they're running low on graves to rob, and take up a new venture—pornography! Uncovering a plethora of used porn (the best kind!), they sell tons of it to horny adolescents. In *TFM* #5, the townsfolk of Mars have had enough comic book shenanigans as comic shops are forced to close and Macon spends a night in the clink.

"Things look pretty bad for our kids," alludes Spears. "But now the stage is set and all the pieces are in place for what will come: the revolt of the teenagers from Mars."

LAST WORD: In *Teenagers from Mars*, too-cool-for-school teens tussle with crappy bosses, making money and right-wing wussies...just to read comics. It's a book that reminds us of, well, us. ■ CASEY SEIJAS

WANNA PICK THIS SERIES UP?

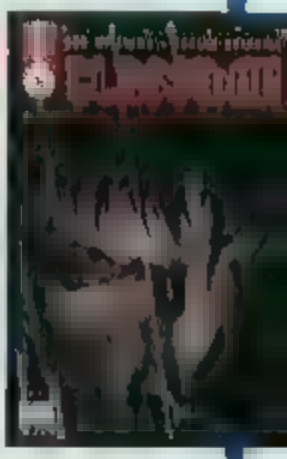
[illegible]

HIDE 'N' SEEK

2002 proved to be a benchmark year for the small press, and deservedly so. Up and coming publishers like IDW and Com.X made an impressive impact on the industry, while established small press publishers such as Oni, Slave Labor and Top Shelf continued their respective traditions of excellence. Here's a rundown of this year's best small press and indy books.

Best Documentary Book: *My Friend Dahmer* (Self-Published) Writer/artist Derf's amazing documentary comic relays the turbulent teenage years of his one-time high school friend who would eventually evolve into one of history's most brutal mass murderers. Dahmer manages to neither criticize nor sympathize with the serial killer, all while serving up one of the most eerie stories to see print this year.

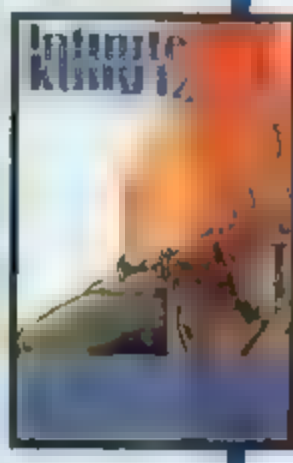
Best Small Press Simian: Jennifer from *My Monkey's Name is Jennifer* (Slave Labor Graphics) Throw a monkey into a comic and it's a sure-fire winner. Throw a pissed-off, dress-wearing monkey into a comic and it's a bonafide comedy classic.



Best Small Press Superhero Comic: *Cla$$war* (Com.X Comics) With a gang of superheroes that make The Authority look like your grandma's knitting circle, *Cla$$war* took the indy press by storm, raised quite a few eyebrows, and made its creators (writer Rob Williams and penciler Trev Hairsine) potential mainstream superstars.

Best Small Press Romance Series: *Pounded* (Oni Press) Proving that Hell hath no fury like a punk rock chick scorned, Brian Wood and Steve Rolston's *Pounded* proved to be the best series of love and loss to hit stands this year.

Best Action Sequences: *Infinite Kung Fu* (Great Lakes Ninja Brotherhood) Kagan McLeod's mixture of old school kung fu and blaxploitation flicks left our heads spinning with break-neck action and soulful art. Bruce Lee's got nothin' on *Infinite*'s cast of badasses.



Best Semi-Legal Collection: *My New Fighting Technique is Unstoppable* (ERP-13 Press) What happens when you combine a bored temp with a wealth of clip art? You laugh your ass off, that's what! David Rees delivers this year's funniest collection of web-based strips complete with cuss words and Karate Snoopy.

Best Publisher of 2002: Oni Press With titles ranging from international espionage tales (*Queen & Country*) to punk rock superheroics (*Hopeless Savages*) to "Seven" esque thrillers (*Skinwalker*), when it came to diversity and quality, Oni stood head and shoulders above its small press counterparts.

2002's Small Press Title of the Year: *30 Days of Night* (IDW) Holding court as the hottest back issue and a million-dollar movie deal on the side, Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith's tale of vampires who terrorize a small Alaska town easily proved to be the standout small press title of the year. Driven by a solid script and chilling art, *30 Days* stands as a modern day small press masterpiece. ■

COMIC MARKET NEWS AND NOTES FOR COLLECTORS EVERYWHERE!

'NET GAINS

DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

Loeb, Lee's 'Batman' leads sales charts

The three L's of success? Lee, Loeb and long ears. Just months after the final installment of "Bruce Wayne: Fugitive," DC has revved up readers, collectors and retailers alike with *Batman* #608. Heralding the new creative team of fan-favorite writer Jeph Loeb and legendary artist Jim Lee, the comic easily flew past the competition to perch atop October's Diamond sales chart, the first time *Batman* has held the position since issue #500 back in 1993.

To the near-unanimous excitement of fans, Loeb and Lee are committed to at least a 12-issue run on *Batman*.

"I've said from the beginning if Jim wants to keep going, I'm there," Loeb reveals. "Of course, it'll depend on DC and the fans' reaction—both of which have been great so far!"

Retailers are especially jazzed about the dream team project. "It's got the entire package," says Mike Banks, owner of Samurai Comics in Phoenix. "You get creators like Loeb and Lee working on arguably the No. 1 character in comics, and it can't not be a winner."

Brendan Boyle, general manager of Coliseum of Comics in Orlando, Fla., agrees. "If you had Lee without Loeb, or vice versa, it wouldn't be this huge," he says. "But put a good creative team with a solid idea on an already decent-selling book like *Batman*—it's a retailer's dream."

Batman #608 surpassed Ultimate books and '80s tie-ins to snag the top spot, and most retailers are predicting more of the same. "It should stay at least in the top five for the entire 12-issue run," says Banks. "It's DC's best shot at being right up there with Marvel's Ultimate books."

Boyle adds that he's increased orders for *Batman* by up to five or six times normal. "Even with that said, there are going to be plenty of people who underorder," he says. "Look at Kevin Smith's *Green Arrow* run. Everybody knew demand was going to be huge on that, but the books still completely sold out and back issue prices went up."

But even with all the upsides of having superstar creators on a book, there are still risks.

"Will they be able to do all 12 issues? Or are there going to be fill-in artists or late books?" asks Eric Thornton, general manager of Chicago Comics. "Jim Lee hasn't done a sustained monthly series since when? 'Heroes Reborn' [in 1996]? *X-Men* [in 1992]?" (For the record, Lee had already penciled seven of his 12 *Batman* issues before #608 even shipped.)

With the anticipation of the Loeb/Lee run on *Batman* combined with the upcoming *Superman 10-Cent Adventure*, is DC primed for a sales resurgence?

"Lee and Loeb on *Batman* is a nice marketing event," says Thornton, "but it's not going to change much [for DC's entire line of titles]. My guess is this won't even affect sales on the other Bat-family titles. There won't be any rallying cry of 'Make mine DC!'"

Boyle believes credit should be given to DC for trying something new. "DC editorial has traditionally been slow to react to trends," he says. "Of course, much of what makes Marvel successful these days was cribbed from stuff DC has done for years, but we'd like to see them do more of this stuff that makes a big splash." ■ **JIM ARENART**

KNIGHT WATCH Thanks to the Jeph Loeb/Jim Lee Batman team-up, the Caped Crusader is back on top of the sales chart.

QUARTER BY QUARTER

Marvel offers entry-point 25-cent comics throughout 2003

The House of Ideas is partying like it's 1975.

Continuing the trend of low-cost comics priced to attract new readers to try an ongoing series (like the nine-cent *Fantastic Four* #60), Marvel has made the promotion a regular staple throughout the upcoming year. When appropriate, Marvel will choose an entry-point book (a comic that provides an accessible jumping-on point for people unfamiliar with a series or who haven't read it in a while) and price it at a mere 25 cents.

The first choice? January's *Daredevil* #41. Not only does the issue kick off "Lowlife," the next storyarc from writer Brian Michael Bendis and artist Alex Maleev, but the release coincides perfectly to tie in with the upcoming "Daredevil" major motion picture on February 14, 2003. The bargain-priced comic will go on sale Jan. 8, and to keep the momentum going, *Daredevil* #42 will be released two weeks after that.

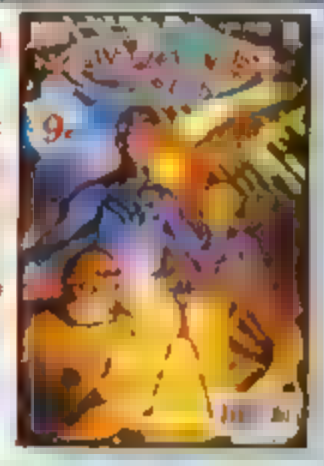
"Lowlife" primarily deals with the aftermath of the current DD storyline in which lawyer Matt Murdock's secret identity has been outed to the press, but it also introduces a new love interest for the star-crossed superhero.

Asked which other books are likely to get the "Quarter Comics" treatment, Marvel Marketing and Communications Manager Bill Rosemann replies, "We decided not to limit ourselves to a fixed schedule. We'd rather let the characters, stories and creators dictate when another 25-cent issue will happen. Having said that, I wouldn't be surprised to see Spider-Man, X-Men and Hulk later this year." ■ KARL CRAMER

LINEBYLINE

TOP 10 SELLING BOOKS OF 2002 BASED ON ESTIMATED INITIAL ORDERS

1. **Fantastik Four #60 (Marvel) 752,100 estimated initial copies sold**
A penny can make or break a book's sales. August's nine-cent *FF* #60 (which debuted writer Mark Waid and penciler Mike Wieringo) trumped January's *Batman: The 10 Cent Adventure* in the showdown of the "cent"-ury. These sales were the highest the industry saw in a decade!



2. **Batman: The 10 Cent Adventure** (DC) 671,300
3. **Batman: Dark Knight Strikes Again #3** (DC) 189,500
4. **Origin #6 (Marvel)** 171,500
5. **Batman: Dark Knight Strikes Again #2** (DC) 159,500
6. **Ultimates #1** (Marvel) 153,200
7. **Transformers: Armada #1** (Dreamwave Productions) 146,200
8. **Transformers: Generation 1 #4** (Dreamwave) 135,800
9. **Transformers: Generation 1 #3** (Dreamwave) 132,300
10. **Transformers: Generation 1 #5** (Dreamwave) 131,000

UPS & DOWNS

UP GHOST IN THE SHELL 2 Dark Horse's *Ghost in the Shell 2: Man-Machine Interface* #1 made an impressive splash at No. 62 on the Diamond sales chart. This is the highest-ranking manga book since the glory days of *Pokémon* a few years back.

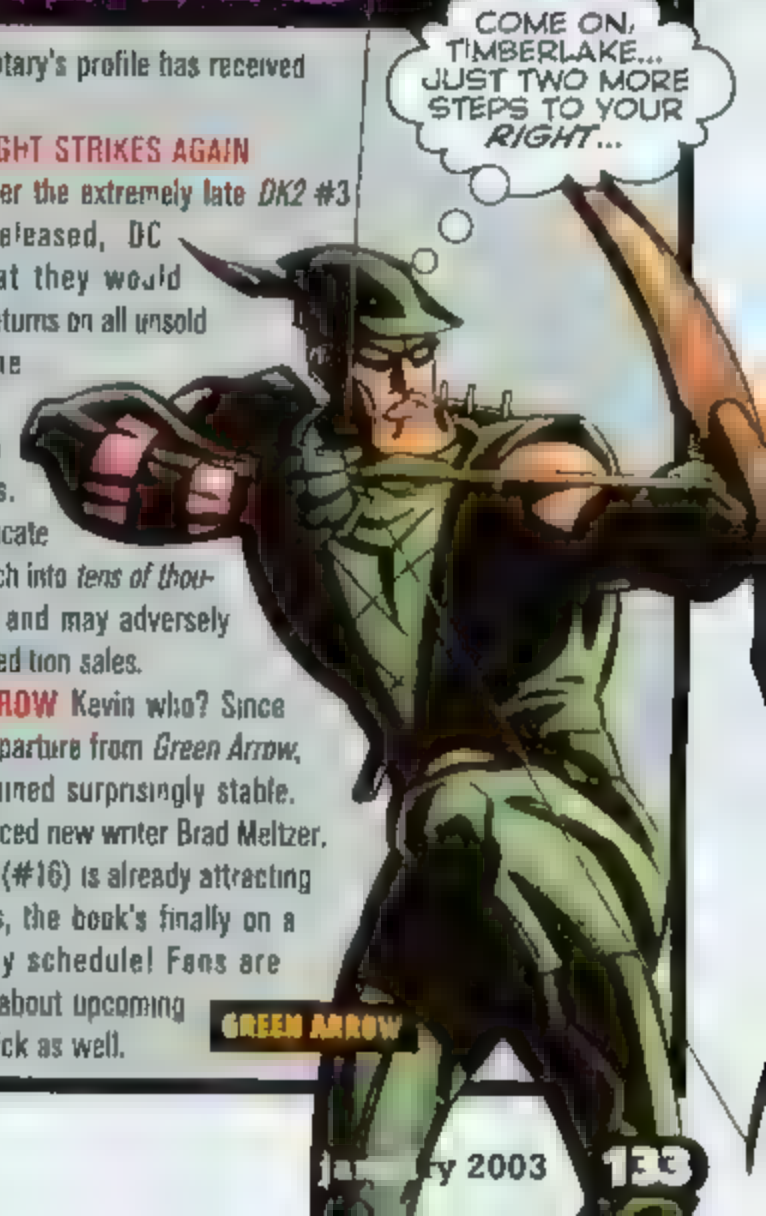
UP G.I. JOE: FRONT LINE YO JOE! The debut of Devil's Due's spin-off title (featuring the return of long-time Joe scribe Larry Hama) advanced to the sales front line, dodging a barrage of high-profile books like *Spider-Man: Blue* and *Captain America* to claim the No. 13 slot.

UP CARTOON COMICS Back issues of select cartoon-themed books like *Sonic the Hedgehog* and *Simpsons Comics* are starting to show legs on the secondary market. The reason? Rumblings of an early-'90s nostalgia resurgence are kicking into gear.

UP THE 'NAM Also moving at a brisk pace on the back market are early issues of Marvel's Vietnam War-themed series. Bargain hunters dig Michael Golden's art, and due to the current U.S. political climate, the military's profile has received a boost.

DOWN DARK KNIGHT STRIKES AGAIN Just months after the extremely late *DK2* #3 was finally released, DC announced that they would accept retailer returns on all unsold copies of the three-issue mini-series due to fizzling sales. Retailer polls indicate returns could reach into *tens of thousands* of copies and may adversely affect collected edition sales.

UP GREEN ARROW Kevin who? Since Kevin Smith's departure from *Green Arrow*, sales have remained surprisingly stable. Fans have embraced new writer Brad Meltzer, as his first issue (#16) is already attracting a premium. Plus, the book's finally on a regular monthly schedule! Fans are already buzzing about upcoming writer Judd Winick as well.



Comics by the Numbers
THE TICKER

81,000

Estimated sales increase of copies of *Batman* from September's #607 to October's #608

5,100

Estimated number of life-size rubber Spider-Man statues that will be given away as prizes through Blockbuster Entertainment video stores in conjunction with the VHS/DVD release of "Spider-Man"

3,550

Amount paid, in dollars, for a full-page ad in *Variety* by two "Witchblade" fans. They were begging another network to pick up the show since it was recently dropped by TNT.

1,548

Amount, in damages, translated from yen to American dollars, that a man in Nugata, Japan is suing his mother and grandmother for because (a) his grandmother threw away his comic collection without his consent and (b) his mother didn't stop her

1,500

Minimum bid, in dollars, for the ownership rights to Chaos! Comics' Evil Ernie

80

Slot number on the Diamond sales chart that *Sojourn* #16 held for the month of October, the highest ranking this CrossGen title has attained

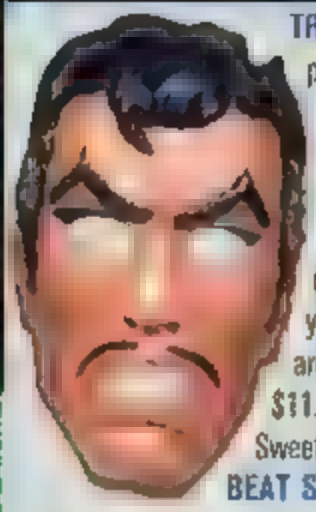
75

Amount, in dollars, paid for a photograph that "X2" actress Famke Janssen took of her dog for an online charity auction. The pooch is even wearing an "X2" sweater!

29

Number of slots that *Fables* has moved up the Diamond sales chart from August's issue #4 (No. 125) to October's #6 (No. 96)

SOLD ONLINE!



TREMBLE THIMBLES If you're gonna be man enough to sew, be prepared. Accidents can happen, supervillains can attack, etc. That's why you need this set of Marvel Superheroes Thimbles. Spider-Man, Captain America, Thor, the Thing and others are ready to keep your thumbs prick-free and your sachet Green Goblin-safe for only $10.83.

HALLOWEENIE Flash back to 1980. Mom comes home from the drugstore with your Halloween costume. Who did she get for you? Batman? Darth Vader? No, it's...Dr. Strange, complete with arched eyebrows and sleazeball moustache (left). Internet access and $11.95 helps you remember the year you went door-to-door as the Sweettooth Supreme.

BEAT STREET BATS Oh yeah, Batman can break off a little somethin'-somethin' on the dance floor. Need proof? Check out this Takara 14" Dancing Batman, available only in Japan or online for $49.90. After all, the guy has plenty to dance about: Dead parents, dead sidekick, dead lover, estranged sidekicks, Joel Schumacher films...

FROTHY FURY When you want quality superheroes, you don't turn to Marvel or DC. No, you go straight to the REAL source—the American Dairy Association. Teaming up with Archway Cookies in 1982, the union produced this Milkman Plastic Cup Premium (right)—with art by the legendary Neal Adams! Wear a milk moustache with pride for $8.99 online.

POWERS 101 In the early 1980s, there was only one place where rookie superheroes could get the proper training for their burgeoning powers. No, not Xavier's School; we're talking about "Hero High," the occasionally missed Filmation cartoon that featured young heroes with porn star names (Captain California, Glorious Gal, Dirty Trixie). You coulda snagged this "Hero High" video (left) for all the wrong reasons for $3.99.

TELL US about your weird online findings! Send photos, etc. to:
SOLD ONLINE
c/o Wizard Entertainment
151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY 10920
e-mail: soldonline@wizardworld.com

TREASURE HUNT

IN BACK-ISSUE BINS

Hey now, what's this? A comic from 1972 showing up here? *Incredible Hulk* #141 features the first appearance of gamma-irradiated, psychiatrist Doc Samson. While Samson surfaced as a key player in recent issues of *Incredible Hulk* (vol. 2) and the *Banner* mini-series, rumor has it that he'll be popping up in the "Hulk" feature film! Can fans expect an all-out slugfest to accompany those Hulk-mutts? If that's the case, *Hulk* #141 currently valued at $32, stands to rake in much more green once the movie hits on June 20, 2003.

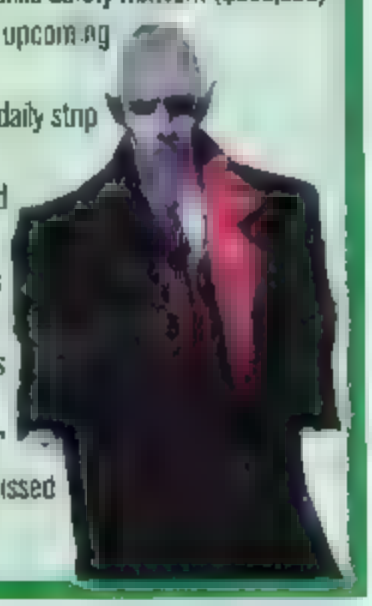
ON THE COMIC RACKS

"I want to eat your Ultimate brain!" Fans have been begging *Ultimate Spider-Man* scribe Brian Michael Bendis for his version of symbiotic no-goodnick Venom for a couple of years now. With December's *Ultimate Spider-Man* #33, Bendis and artist Mark Bagley finally deliver the Ultimate incarnation of the Spidey nemesis who, on multiple occasions, has threatened to chow down on the web-slinger's cortex. With the regular Marvel Universe Venom M.I.A. due to overexposure over the years, expect the character's $2.25-priced Ultimate debut to increase in value like a fast-acting poison. As Venom would say, "We guarantee it!"

MILLION DOLLAR DAZE

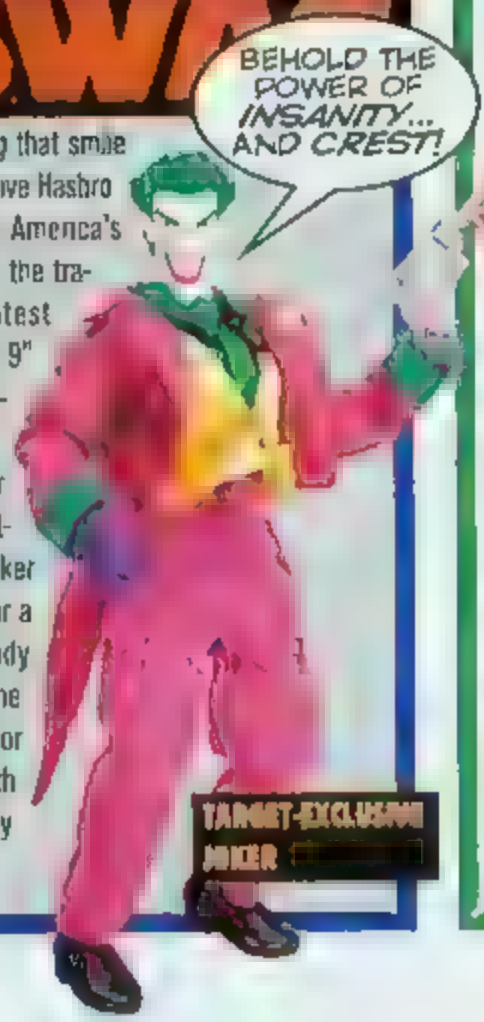
Got a million smackeroos burnin' holes in your pockets? Then check out the coolest comic crap to blow your wad on!

- All of Kevin Eastman's original art from Mirage's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (vol. 1) #1 ($1 million)
- The film rights to Steve Niles' *30 Days of Night* (est. at $1 million) **[below]**
- 11 million copies of the nine-cent *Fantastic Four* #60
- A piece of Bill Everett original art from 1939's *Marvel Comics* #1 along with a NM (near mint) copy of the issue (est. at $1 million)
- 20,000 day passes for Universal Studios Marvel Islands of Adventure
- 142,857 shares of Marvel stock (as of press time; enough to get you a seat on the board?)
- All of the original art (as of press time) available on www.AlexRossArt.com ($317,250)
- The 1989 Batmobile used in Tim Burton's "Batman" (sold online for $210,900, but failed to meet reserve)
- The working replica of the Mach 5 built by the Child Safety Network ($250,000)
- Cyclops' 2004 Mazda RX-8, as seen in the upcoming "X2" film (est. at $30,000)
- The three-panel section of the first Superman daily strip (sold at Sotheby's: $115,000)
- Nicolas Cage's copy of *Action Comics* #1 (sold by Heritage Auctions: $86,250)
- The original Bat-Cycle, used in the classic 1960s "Batman" TV series (sold online for $50,400, but failed to meet reserve. Burt Ward and his groupies not included.)
- Stolen (but recently recovered) "Spider-Man" movie costumes ($50,000 apiece, but ya missed your chance, damn competent policework!)



COOLSWAG

PRETTY STUFF THAT'S WORTH MONEY

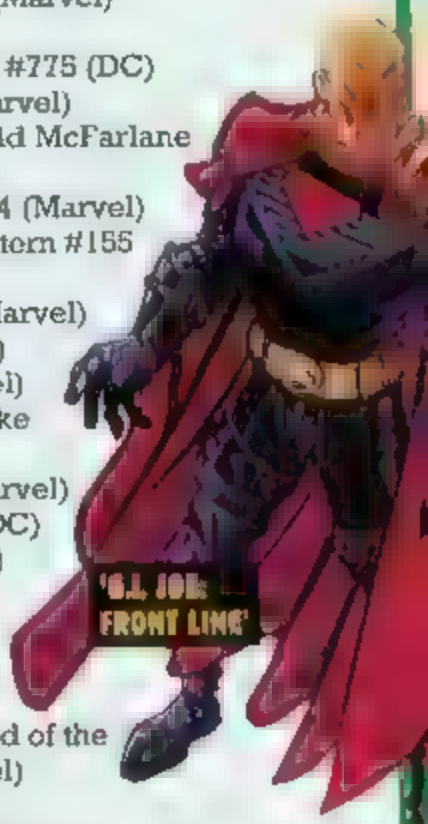


Harley Quinn ain't the only thing keeping that smile on the Joker's face. As this Target-exclusive Hasbro figure attests, the Clown Prince is still America's most popular garish psychopath. Cast in the tradition of Mego's "World's Greatest Superheroes" figures from the '70s, this 9" nutjob comes with a removable cloth outfit and accessories out the wazoo! Joker's articulated fingers can grip his cane or classic "BANG" pistol, and his surprise gift-box pops open to reveal a vile mini-Joker inside! While the devilish droog retails for a pretty $20, increasing rarity has already pushed his pasty mug north of $30 online. If one baddie isn't enough, watch out for Hasbro's Target-exclusive Penguin (with squirting umbrella action), which is already waddling out online.

TOP 50

THE BEST-SELLERS OF OCTOBER

1. (*32*) Batman #608 (DC)
2. (*2*) Ultimates #9 (Marvel)
3. (-) Transformers: The War Within #1 (Dreamwave Productions)
4. (*3*) New X-Men #133 (Marvel)
5. (*4*) Amazing Spider-Man #46 (Marvel)
6. (*6, 7*) Ultimate Spider-Man #28 (Marvel)
7. (*6, 7*) Ultimate Spider-Man #29 (Marvel)
8. (*8*) Ultimate X-Men #23 (Marvel)
9. (*5*) Spider-Man/Black Cat: Evil that Men Do #5 (Marvel)
10. (*10, 11*) Uncanny X-Men #414 (Marvel)
11. (*9*) Transformers: Armada #4 (Dreamwave Productions)
12. (*12*) Thundercats #3 (DC/Wildstorm)
13. **(-) G.I. Joe: Front Line #1** (Image/Devil's Due) "I'm just trying to do likeable characters that have a sense of honor and integrity and stories that make sense," maintains *Front Line* scribe and G.I. Joe icon Larry Hama. "Same as always. I know that sometimes this falls out of fashion, but it's nice to see it making a bit of a comeback."
14. (*13*) Wolverine #182 (Marvel)
15. (*14*) Spider-Man: Blue #6 (Marvel)
16. (*15*) X-Treme X-Men #19 (Marvel)
17. (*16*) Captain America #6 (RES) (Marvel)
18. (*18, 20*) JLA #73 (DC)
19. (*18, 20*) JLA #74 (DC)
20. (*17*) G.I. Joe #11 (Image/Devil's Due)
21. (*22*) Peter Parker: Spider-Man #49 (Marvel)
22. (*23*) Green Arrow #18 (DC)
23. (*25*) Avengers #59 (Marvel)
24. (*27*) Daredevil #38 (Marvel)
25. (*24*) Fantastic Four #62 (Marvel)
26. (*19*) Battle of the Planets #4 (Top Cow Productions/Image)
27. (*28*) Incredible Hulk #46 (Marvel)
28. (*31*) League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Vol. 2 #4 (Wildstorm/ABC)
29. (*29, 30*) Punisher #17 (RES) (Marvel)
30. (*29, 30*) Punisher #18 (Marvel)
31. (*33*) JSA #41 (DC)
32. (*34*) Detective Comics #775 (DC)
33. (*21*) Weapon X #2 (Marvel)
34. (*36*) Spawn #127 (Todd McFarlane Productions/Image)
35. (*37*) X-Statix #4 (Marvel)
36. (*40*) Green Lantern #155 (DC)
37. (*38*) Exiles #18 (Marvel)
38. (*41*) Thor #55 (Marvel)
39. ( ) Mekanix #1 (Marvel)
40. (*35*) Wolverine: Netsuke #2 (Marvel)
41. (*43*) Iron Man #60 (Marvel)
42. (*42*) Superman #187 (DC)
43. (*45*) Hawkman #8 (DC)
44. (*47*) Batman: Gotham Knights #34 (DC)
45. (*51*) Action Comics #796 (DC)
46. ( ) Spider-Man: Legend of the Spider Clan #1 (Marvel)
47. (*48*) Batgirl #33 (DC)
48. ( ) Paradise X #6 (Marvel)
49. (*50*) Adventures of Superman #609 (DC)
50. (*26*) Captain Marvel #2 (Marvel)



HOTTEST BACK ISSUES

HOT 10 comics

***Wizard*, by staying in touch with hundreds of retailers throughout the country, keeps a close eye on the hottest back issues. These are the books ringing the registers this month...**

1 30 DAYS OF NIGHT #1

WRITER: Steve Niles
ARTIST: Ben Templesmith

Eat this, Blade! Thanks in part to scarce first printings, a million dollar movie deal in the works and not to mention one of the coolest stories to hit stands this year, *30 Days of Night* #1 tops the Hot 10 list once again, beating out the industry big boys for the second month in a row. Buzz has built around this title faster than a shot of tequila (or a Bloody Mary) on an empty stomach, and second printings went just as fast as the first. **LAST MONTH: 1**

2 ULTIMATES #2

WRITER: Mark Millar
ARTISTS: Bryan Hitch & Andrew Currie

You just can't thwart the Ultimate line. After all, when you've got the hottest series in comics (see "Best of the Best" on page 86) coupled with that whole "terrible two" curse (second issues being less copious than the first), it's pretty obvious that *Ultimates* #2 remains one of the most sought-after titles on the back market. Collector interest has yet to fizzle out on this one, and you'll have to scrounge up $8.50 if you missed out on this ish the first time around. **LAST MONTH: 2**

3 Y-THE LAST MAN #1

WRITER: Brian K. Vaughan
ARTISTS: Pia Guerra & Jose Marzan

You know, we really don't see why Yorick Brown (the title character from Vertigo's latest breakout series) has any reason to complain. After all, he's the ONLY MAN ON EARTH, and let's face it: Britney, J-Lo, Shakira–they're all gonna come callin' eventually. But even the divas will have to pay a pretty penny for a copy of *Y* #1 on the back market. **LAST MONTH: 6**

4 CAPTAIN AMERICA #2

WRITER: John Ney Rieber
ARTIST: John Cassaday

Cap is back and he's bad-ass! Granted, this particular issue of the series is so hot thanks in part to it being another "terrible two," but it's hard to look past the fact that the creative team of Rieber and Cassaday have completely revitalized Marvel's American icon, and fans have reacted in a big way. Shine on, you patriotic diamond. **LAST MONTH: 4**

5 LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN VOL. 2 #1

WRITER: Alan Moore
ARTIST: Kevin O'Neill

Remember when the original League mini-series was released? Probably not, seeing as how tons of fanboys waited for the recent trade to hit shelves. Now that everyone's read it, issues of the sequel have been flying off stands faster than you can say "Quatermain." **LAST MONTH: 8**

6 DAREDEVIL #181

WRITER: Frank Miller
ARTISTS: Frank Miller & Klaus Janson

How in the blue blazes did a 20-year-old book sneak onto this list? Well, we'll tell you how–a little thing known as next February's "Daredevil" major motion picture. Rumor on message boards has it that the film's storyline will parallel that of this classic ish. Hence, a rare book that's only gonna become moreso. **LAST MONTH: N.R. (Not Rated)**

7 FABLES #2

WRITER: Bill Willingham
ARTISTS: Lan Medina & Steve Leialoha

If this month is any indication, maybe we should begin running two Hot 10 lists and devote one solely to "terrible two" books. But then again, it's not like that's all *Fables* #2 has going for it. A unique premise, kick-ass art and the triumphant return of Willingham make this book a must-have. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

8 THE PRO

WRITER: Garth Ennis
ARTISTS: Amanda Connor & Jimmy Palmiotti

Here's a quick way to make a buck. Go up to the creative team of Ennis, Connor and Palmiotti and say, "Make the most offensive, outrageous comic you can possibly create." Why else would the story of a superpowered prostitute sell out completely, earn a second printing and demand $8 on the back market? **LAST MONTH: 9**

9 INCREDIBLE HULK #34

WRITER: Bruce Jones
ARTISTS: John Romita Jr. & Tom Palmer

The Iron Horse of the Hot 10 list continues to hang in there, despite falling six places. What more can we possibly say about this back issue goldmine that hasn't been said in the past eight months (October being the only month it didn't make the cut)? It's got Jones, it's got Romita Jr. and Palmer, it's got Bruce Banner on the run–what's not to love? **LAST MONTH: 3**

10 SPIDER-MAN: LEGEND OF THE SPIDER CLAN #1

WRITER: Kaare Andrews
ARTIST: Skottie Young

Fans just love that manga-influenced webhead, as they've picked up the follow-up to Spidey's mangaverse debut in droves. Could it be that manga has finally found its niche here in the states, or could it have something to do with the manga-symbiote that's introduced in this issue? **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

BULLPEN LOOK BEHIND THE CURTAIN

CZECH IT OUT!

We've joked about it in the past, but this time around, a *Wizard* staffer really found himself in the middle of an international incident.

Staff Writer Casey Seijas recently returned from a five-day jaunt to Prague in the Czech Republic, where he visited the location sets of "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen," the 20th Century Fox feature film based on the DC/WildStorm/America's Best Comics mini-series by Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill. It was Seijas' first trip overseas, and his adventure started almost from the minute he entered the famous Eastern European city.

"Well, the city itself was great, for an ancient world capital," noted the newbie world traveler. "Walking around in my free time was a lot of fun, except for all the dogsh-- that's on the street over there. I must have stepped in it like three or four times."

But the fun didn't end there. During one evening tryst into the city's happening nightlife district, Young Seijas established "foreign relations" with a young *Fräulein* from the German republic. "Let's put it this way: German chicks could teach American women a thing or two how to behave in a bar!"

But Seijas wasn't there for just fun and games; he had a job to do, including visiting the "League" set, hobnobbing with the stars and reporting on his findings.

"Sean Connnery doesn't 'do' interviews, but I got to meet him, which was cool, except all I could think of was the 'SNL' Celebrity Jeopardy skits where he's yelling 'Suck it, Trebek!'" recounted Seijas. "It was a great time on set, until I had to pull aside that jerk from another magazine and give him a talking-to. He woulda got the beatdown if he'd kept flapping his gums!"

So, would Seijas ever return to Prague if given the chance? "Absolutely! As long as they do something about the dogsh-- before I get back."

WIZARD'S CASEY SEIJAS: POOPED OUT!

TAKING A WIZ

ALSO AVAILABLE

TOYFARE #66

Are you ready to *rock*?!? Music toys are sweeping the toy world, with figures that range from No Doubt to Ozzy Osbourne. We serve up interviews, sneak-peeks and behind-the-scenes action with your favorite musicians-turned-toys. Also, get a gander at the X-Men toys we wanna see.

On sale Dec. 11 in comic stores
On sale Dec. 24 everywhere

INQUEST GAMER #93

It's our "Lord of the Rings" extravaganza! Check out or "LotR" Nitpicker's Guide for a look at the film's hidden Easter eggs, the tidbits that didn't make the jump from the books, and a Specialty Guide to Decipher's *Lord of the Rings* game. Plus: *IQ* pits *HeroClix* vs. *MageKnight* vs. *Mech Warrior* in a winner-take-all showdown!

On sale Dec. 4 in comic stores
On sale Dec. 17 everywhere

POSTERMANIA 2003

Tired of staring at those same four walls? What you need is *Wizard's Postermania 2003*! We've got all your favorite characters, like Spider-Man, the X-Men, Daredevil, *Sojourn*'s Arwyn, Fathom, G-Force and loads more, by your favorite artists, such as Joe Quesada, Alex Ross, Joe Linsner, Michael Turner and too many more to list here!

On sale Dec. 4 in comic stores
On sale Dec. 17 everywhere

NEXT ISSUE...

A SNEAK PEEK

2003 MEGA-PREVIEW!

Get the goods on over 100 comic titles and events in our mammoth 2003 preview, including *JLA/Avengers*, Spider-Man, Mike Turner's new Top Cow project, X-Men, Neil Gaiman and Andy Kubert's *1602* and the next Ultimate title (which just might star some of the lovely ladies shown above, by Joe Linsner).

NEXT MONTH IN WIZARD #137

BRYAN SINGER Q&A!

Wizard grills "X-Men 2" director Bryan Singer on the pressures of topping his first mutant hit, his take on new mutants like Nightcrawler and Colossus and what he'd do in "X-Men 3"!!

'DAREDEVIL' SET VISIT!

With Marvel's Man Without Fear set to swing into movie theaters on Feb. 14, *Wizard* heads to the set of 20th Century Fox's upcoming "Daredevil" flick to get a behind-the-scenes look at how director Mark Steven Johnson brought the scarlet-clad crusader to the silver screen.

'X-MEN' FIRST LOOK!

The X-Men have mutated even more, as they've evolved into one of the hottest manga properties around, thanks to Marvel's Mangaverse line of books. Get a six-page, first-look preview of March's mutant manga mini-series, *X-Men: Ronin* with art by Japan's Makoto Nakatsuka.

WIZARD #137

On sale December 18 in comic stores
On sale January 7 everywhere

THE HOTSEAT

This Month Featuring:

RACHEL SKARSTEN

STAR OF WB'S NEW SERIES 'BIRDS OF PREY'

WIZARD: To start off with, can I get your phone number?

SKARSTEN: I'm sorry?

Nothin'. So you're originally from Canada, right?

I am.

Is it true that you can't go five feet without running into a drunk hockey fan riding a moose...

...and that we all live in **igloos**! Come on, I'm from Toronto, which is only six hours away from New York City! I'm also always getting ribbed for my accent, like I say "bean" instead of "been" and "sore-e" instead of "sorry."

Yeah, yeah, I've seen "You Can't Do That on Television."

But is it true everyone plays hockey?

I still play hockey; it's my passion. I play **goaltender**, so I'm a little nuts.

Ever have a terrible hockey-related injury?

No, I've been [*pronounced "bean"*] pretty lucky so far. I've had more injuries acting.

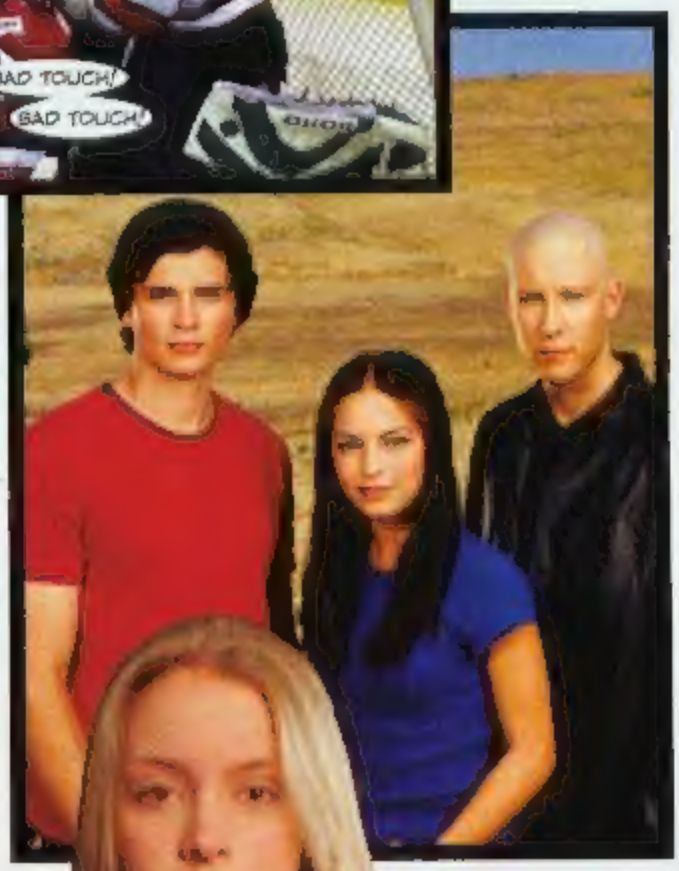
Any in particular?

Well, the most recent was when we were filming the pilot, and there's a scene that involved newspaper flying around. So they're filming my close-up and, WHAP!, this newspaper slaps me right in the face.

Sounds like that hurt your pride more than your face.

Oh yeah.

So who would win in a fight: Clark and the gang from **"Smallville"** or you guys from "Birds of Prey"?



C'mon, three chicks against Tom Welling?! We would just charm him with our femininity before we even had to bring out the punches.

So are you getting a lot of ex-boyfriends calling you now that you're famous?

Not really. Usually the guys who approach me either don't know I'm on **"Birds of Prey,"** or they like me because I play hockey.

■ CASEY SEIJAS

He will never look at himself the same way again...
Neither will you.

AQUAMAN

PREMIERING IN DECEMBER

NEW POWERS NEW MISSION NEW SERIES

Rick Veitch

Yvel Guichet

Mark Propst

Covers by Alex Maleev

Check out the AQUAMAN minisite at dccomics.com

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